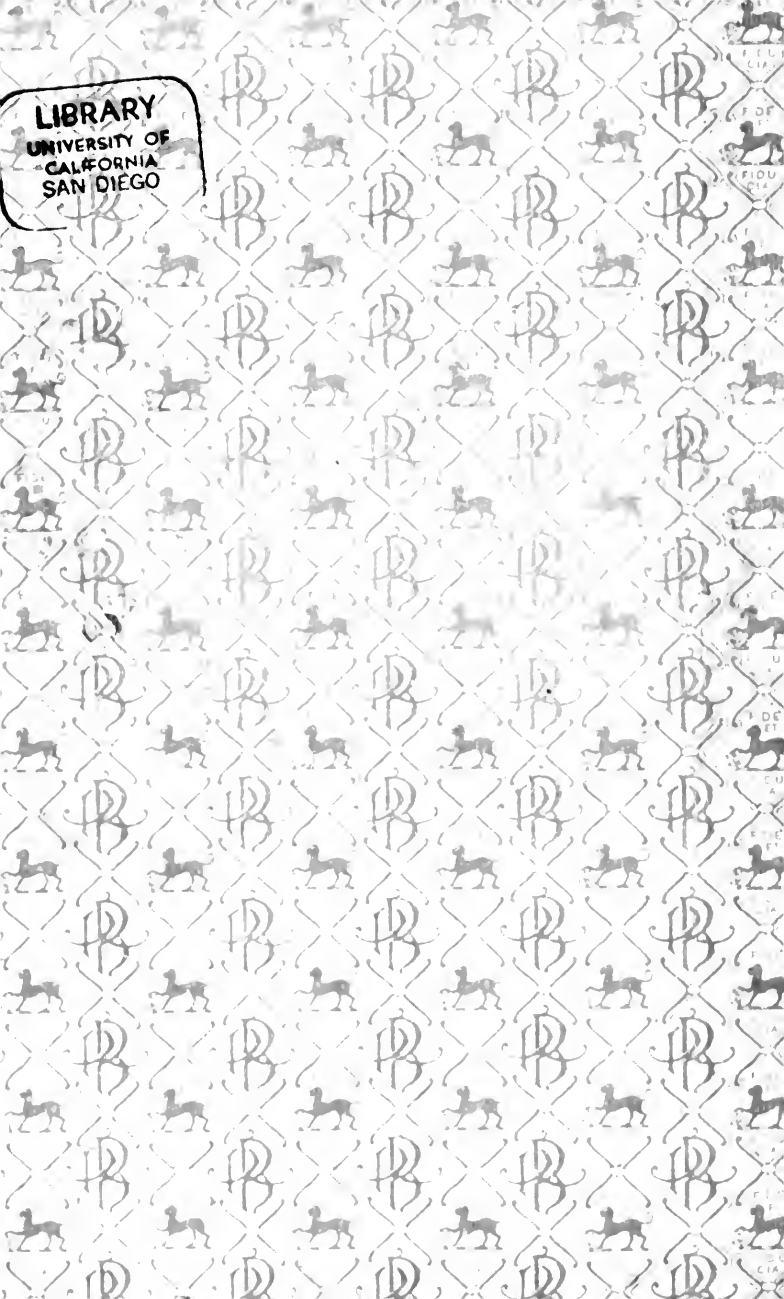
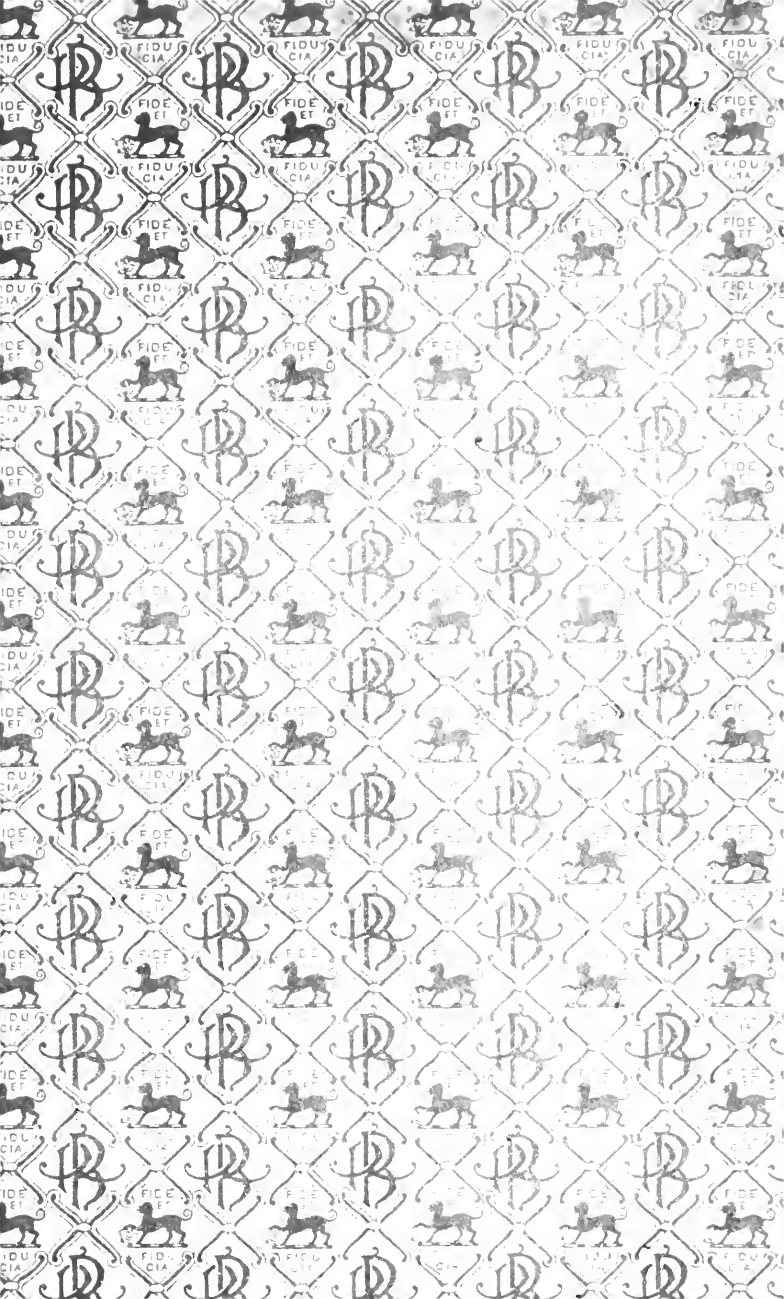


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THE EMANCIPATED

A Nobel

BY

GEORGE GISSING

AUTHOR OF "THE NETHER WORLD," "THYRZA," ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

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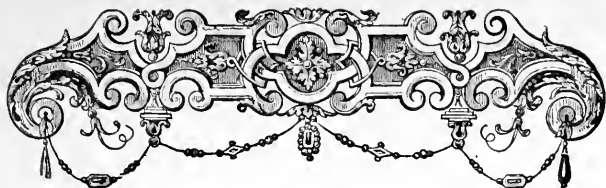
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PART I.

(Continued.)





THE EMANCIPATED.

CHAPTER X.

THE DECLARATION.

It was true enough that Clifford Marsh would have relished an invitation to accompany that party of four to Pompeii. For one thing, he was beginning to have a difficulty in passing his days; if the present state of things prolonged itself, his position might soon resemble that of Mr. Musselwhite. But chiefly would he have welcomed the prospect of spending some hours in the society of Miss Doran, and under circumstances which would enable him to shine. Clifford had begun to nurse a daring ambition. Allowing his

vanity to caress him into the half-belief that he was really making a noble stand against the harshness of fate, he naturally spent much time in imagining how other people regarded him—above all, what figure he made in the eyes of Miss Doran. There could be no doubt that she knew, at all events, the main items of his story ; was it not certain that they must make some appeal to her sympathies ? His air of graceful sadness could not but lead her to muse as often as she observed it ; he had contemplated himself in the mirror, and each time with reassurance on this point. Why should the attractions which had been potent with Madeline fail to engage the interest of this younger and more emotional girl ? Miss Doran was far beyond Madeline in beauty, and, there was every reason to believe, had the substantial gifts of fortune which Madeline altogether lacked. It was a bold thing to turn his eye to her with such a thought, circumstances considered ; but the boldness was characteristic of

Marsh, with whom at all times self-esteem had the force of an irresistible argument.

He was incapable of passion. Just as he had made a pretence of pursuing art, because of a superficial cleverness and a liking for ease and the various satisfactions of his vanity in such a career, so did he now permit his mind to be occupied with Cecily Doran, not because her qualities blinded him to all other considerations, but in pleasant yielding to a temptation of his fancy, which made a lively picture of many desirable things, and flattered him into thinking that they were not beyond his reach. For the present he could do nothing but wait, supporting his pose of placid martyrdom. Wait, and watch every opportunity ; there would arrive a moment when seeming recklessness might advance him far on the way to triumph.

And yet he never for a moment regarded himself as a schemer endeavouring to compass vulgar ends by machination. He had the remarkable faculty of viewing himself in

an ideal light, even whilst conscious that so many of his claims were mere pretence. Men such as Clifford Marsh do not say to themselves, "What a humbug I am!" When driven to face their conscience, it speaks to them rather in this way: "You are a fellow of fine qualities, altogether out of the common way of men. A pity that conditions do not allow you to be perfectly honest; but people in general are so foolish that you would get no credit for your superiority if you did not wear a little tinsel, practise a few harmless affectations. Some day your difficulties will be at an end, and then you can afford to show yourself in a simpler guise." When he looked in the glass, Clifford admired himself without reserve; when he talked freely, he applauded his own cleverness, and thought it the most natural thing that other people should do so. When he meditated abandoning Madeline, his sincere view of the matter was that she had proved herself unworthy: however sensible her attitude,

a girl had no right to put such questions to her lover as she had done, to injure his self-love. When he plotted with himself to engage Cecily's interest, he said that it was the course any lover would have pursued. And in the end he really persuaded himself that he was in love with her.

Yet none the less he thought of Madeline with affection. He was piqued that she made no effort to bring him back to her feet. To be sure, her mother's behaviour probably implied Madeline's desire of reconciliation, but he wished her to make personal overtures; he would have liked to see her approach him with humble eyes, not troubling himself to debate how he should act in that event. With Mrs. Denyer he was once more on terms of apparent friendliness, though he held no private dialogue with her; he was willing that she should suppose him gradually coming over to her views. Barbara and Zillah showed constraint when he spoke

with them, but this he affected not to perceive. Only with Madeline he did not converse. Her air of unconcernedness at length proved too much for his patience, and so it came about that Madeline received by post a letter addressed in Clifford's hand. She took it to her bedroom, and broke the envelope with agitation.

“Your behaviour is heartless. Just when I am in deep distress, and need all possible encouragement in the grave struggle upon which I have entered—for I need not tell you that I am resolved to remain an artist—you desert me, and do your best to show that you are glad at being relieved of all concern on my account. It is well for me that I see the result of this test, but, I venture to think, not every woman would have chosen your course. I shall very shortly leave Naples. It will no doubt complete your satisfaction to think of me toiling friendless in London. Remember this as my farewell.—C. M.”

The next morning Clifford received what he expected, a reply, also sent by post. It was written in the clearest and steadiest hand, on superfine paper.

“I am sorry you should have repeated your insult in a written form ; I venture to think that not every man would have followed this course. For myself, it is well indeed that I see the result of the test to which you have been exposed. But I shall say and think no more of it. As you leave soon, I would suggest that we should be on the terms of ordinary acquaintances for the remaining time ; the present state of things is both disagreeable and foolish. It will always seem to me a very singular thing that you should have continued to live in this house ; but that, of course, was in your own discretion.—M. D.”

This was on the morning when Cecily and her companions went to Pompeii. Towards luncheon-time, Clifford entered the drawing-room, and there found Mrs. Lessingham in conversation with Madeline. The

former looked towards him in a way which seemed to invite his approach.

“Another idle morning, Mr. Marsh?” was her greeting.

“I had a letter at breakfast that disturbed me,” he replied, seating himself away from Madeline.

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

“Mr. Marsh is very easily disturbed,” said Madeline, in a light tone of many possible meanings.

“Yes,” admitted Clifford, leaning back and letting his head droop a little; “I can seldom do anything when I am not quite at ease in mind. Rather a misfortune, but not an uncommon one with artists.”

The conversation turned on this subject for a few minutes, Madeline taking part in it in a way that showed her resolve to act as she had recommended in her note. Then Mrs. Lessingham rose and left the two together. Madeline seemed also about to move; she followed the departing lady

with her eyes, and at length, as though adding a final remark, said to Clifford:

“There are several things you have been so kind as to lend me that I must return before you go, Mr. Marsh. I will make a parcel of them, and a servant shall take them to your room.”

“Thank you.”

Since the quarrel, Madeline had not worn her ring of betrothal, but this was the first time she had spoken of returning presents.

“I am sorry you have had news that disturbed you,” she continued, as if in calm friendliness. “But I dare say it is something you will soon forget. In future you probably won’t think so much of little annoyances.”

“Probably not.”

She smiled, and walked away, stopping to glance at a picture before she left the room. Clifford was left with knitted brows and uneasy mind; he had not believed her capable of this sedateness. For some reason, Madeline had been dressing herself

with unusual care of late (the result, in fact, of a frequent observation of Cecily), and just now, as he entered, it had struck him that she was after all very pretty, that no one could impugn his taste in having formerly chosen her. His reference to her letter was a concession, made on the moment's impulse. Her rejecting it so unmistakably looked serious. Had she even ceased to be jealous?

In the course of the afternoon, one of Madame Glück's servants deposited a parcel in his chamber. When he found it, he bit his lips. Indeed, things looked serious at last. He passed the hours till dinner in rather comfortless solitude.

But at dinner he was opposite Cecily, and he thought he had never seen her so brilliant. Perhaps the day in the open air—there was a fresh breeze—had warmed the exquisite colour of her cheeks and given her eyes an even purer radiance than of wont. The dress she wore was not new to him, but its perfection made stronger appeal to

his senses than previously. How divine were the wreaths and shadowings of her hair ! With what gracile loveliness did her neck bend as she spoke to Mrs. Lessingham ! What hand ever shone with more delicate beauty than hers in the offices of the meal ? It pained him to look at Madeline and make comparison.

Moreover, Cecily met his glance, and smiled — smiled with adorable frankness. From that moment he rejoiced at what had taken place to day. It had left him his complete freedom. Good ; he had given Madeline a final chance, and she had neglected it. In every sense he was at liberty to turn his thoughts elsewhere, and now he felt that he had even received encouragement.

“ We had an unexpected meeting with Mr. Elgar,” were Cecily’s words, when she spoke to her aunt of the day’s excursion.

Mrs. Lessingham showed surprise, and

noticed that Cecily kept glancing over the columns of a newspaper she had carelessly taken up.

“At Pompeii?”

“Yes; in the Street of Tombs. For some reason, he had delayed on his journey.”

“I’m not surprised.”

“Why?”

“Delay is one of his characteristics, isn’t it?” returned the elder lady, with unaccustomed tartness. “A minor branch of the root of inefficiency.”

“I am afraid so.”

Cecily laughed, and began to read aloud an amusing passage from the paper. Her aunt put no further question; but after dinner sought Mrs. Bradshaw, and had a little talk on the subject. Mrs. Bradshaw allowed herself no conjectures; in her plain way she merely confirmed what Cecily had said, adding that Elgar had taken leave of them at the railway-station.

“Possibly Mrs. Baske knew that her brother would be there?” surmised Mrs

Lessingham, as though the point were of no moment.

“ Oh no ! not a bit. She was astonished.”

“ Or seemed so,” was Mrs. Lessingham’s inward comment, as she smiled acquiescence. “ He has impressed me agreeably,” she continued, “ but there’s a danger that he will never do justice to himself.”

“ I don’t put much faith in him myself,” said Mrs. Bradshaw, meaning nothing more by the phrase than that she considered Reuben a ne’er-do-well. The same words would have expressed her lack of confidence in a servant subjected to some suspicion.

Mrs. Lessingham was closely observant of her niece this evening, and grew confirmed in distrust, in solicitude. Cecily was more than ever unlike herself—was whimsical, abstracted, nervous ; she flushed at an unexpected sound, could not keep the same place for more than a few minutes. Much before the accustomed hour, she announced her retirement for the night.

“ Let me feel your pulse,” said Mrs.

Lessingham, as if in jest, when the girl approached her.

Cecily permitted it, half averting her face.

“My child, you are feverish.”

“A little, I believe, aunt. It will pass by the morning.”

“Let us hope so. But I don’t like that kind of thing at Naples. I trust you haven’t had a chill?”

“Oh dear, no! I never was better in my life!”

“Yet with fever? Go to bed. Very likely I shall look into your room in the night. Cecily!”

It stopped her at the door. She turned, and took a step back. Mrs. Lessingham moved towards her.

“You haven’t forgotten anything that you wished to say to me?”

“Forgotten? No, dear aunt.”

“It just come back to my mind that you were on the point of saying something a little while ago, and I interrupted you.”

“No. Good night.”

Mrs. Lessingham did enter the girl's room something after midnight, carrying a dim taper. Cecily was asleep, but lay as though fatigue had overcome her after much restless moving upon the pillow. Her face was flushed ; one of her hands, that on the coverlet, kept closing itself with a slight spasm. The visitor drew apart and looked about the chamber. Her eyes rested on a little writing-desk, where lay a directed envelope. She looked at it, and found it was addressed to a French servant of theirs in Paris, an excellent woman who loved Cecily, and to whom the girl had promised to write from Italy. The envelope was closed ; but it could contain nothing of importance —was merely an indication of Cecily's abiding kindness. By this lay a small book, from the pages of which protruded a piece of white paper. Mrs. Lessingham took up the volume—it was Shelley—and found that the paper within it was folded about a spray of maidenhair, and

bore the inscription, "House of Meleager, Pompeii. Monday, December 8, 1878." Over this the inquisitive lady mused, until a motion of Cecily caused her to restore things rapidly to their former condition.

A movement, and a deep sigh ; but Cecily did not awake. Mrs. Lessingham again drew softly near to her, and, without letting the light fall directly upon her face, looked at her for a long time. She whispered feelingly, "Poor girl ! poor child !" then, with a sigh almost as deep as that of the slumberer, withdrew.

In the morning, Cecily was already dressed when a servant brought letters to the sitting-room. There were three, and one of them, addressed to herself, had only the Naples postmark. She went back to her bedroom with it.

After breakfast, Mrs. Lessingham spoke for a while of news contained in her correspondence ; then of a sudden asked :

"You hadn't any letters ?"

“Yes, aunt; one.”

“My child, you are far from well this morning. The fever hasn’t gone. Your face burns.”

“Yes.”

“May I ask from whom the letter was?”

“I have it here—to show you.” A choking of her voice broke the sentence. She held out the letter. Mrs. Lessingham found the following lines :—

“DEAR CECILY,

“I have, of course, returned to Naples, and I earnestly hope I may see you between ten and eleven to-morrow morning. I must see you alone. You cannot reply; I will come and send my name in the ordinary way.

“Yours ever,

“R. ELGAR.”

Mrs. Lessingham looked up. Cecily, who was standing before her, now met her gaze steadily.

“The meaning of this is plain enough,” said her aunt, with careful repression of feeling. “But I am at a loss to understand how it has come about.”

“I cannot tell you, aunt. I cannot tell myself.”

Cecily's true accents once more. It was as though she had recovered all her natural self-command now that the revelation was made. The flush still possessed her cheeks, but she had no look of embarrassment ; she spoke in a soft murmur, but distinctly, firmly.

“I am afraid that is only too likely, dear. Come and sit down, little girl, and tell me, at all events, something about it.”

“Little girl ?” repeated Cecily, with a sweet, affectionate smile. “No ; that has gone by, aunt.”

“I thought so myself the other day ; but—— I suppose you have met Mr. Elgar several times at his sister's, and have said nothing to me about it ?”

“That would not have been my usual

behaviour, I hope. When did I deceive you, aunt ? ”

“ Never, that I know. Where have you met, then ? ”

“ Only at the times and places of which you know.”

“ Where did you give Mr. Elgar the right to address you in this manner ? ”

“ Only yesterday. I think you mustn’t ask me more than that, aunt.”

“ I’m afraid your companions were rather lacking in discretion,” said the other, in a tone of annoyance.

“ No ; not in the sense you attach to the words. But, aunt, you are speaking as if I *were* a little girl, to be carefully watched at every step.”

Mrs. Lessingham mused, looking absently at the letter. She paid no heed to her niece’s last words, but at length said, with decision :

“ Cecily, this meeting cannot take place.”

The girl replied with a look of uttermost astonishment.

“ It is impossible, dear. Mr. Elgar should not have written to you like this. He should have addressed himself to other people.”

“ Other people ? But you don’t understand, aunt. I cannot explain to you. I expected this letter ; and we must see each other.”

Her voice trembled, failed.

“ Shall you not treat my wish with respect, Cecily ? ”

“ Will you explain to me all that you do wish, aunt ? ”

“ Certainly. It is true that you are not a French girl, and I have no desire to regard you as though we were a French aunt and niece talking of this subject in the conventional way. But you are very young, dear, and most decidedly it behoved Mr. Elgar to bear in mind both his and your position. You have no parents, unhappily, but you know that Mr. Mallard is legally appointed the guardian of your interests, and I trust you know also that I am deeply concerned in all that affects you. Let us say nothing,

one way or another, of what has happened. Since it *has* happened, it was Mr. Elgar's duty to address himself to me, or to Mr. Mallard, before making private appointments with you."

"Aunt, you can see that this letter is written so as to allow of my showing it to you."

"I have noticed that, of course. It makes Mr. Elgar's way of proceeding seem still more strange to me. He is good enough to ask you to relieve him of what he thinks——"

"You misunderstand him, aunt, entirely. I cannot explain it to you. Only trust me, I beg, to do what I know to be right. It is necessary that I should speak with Mr. Elgar; do not pain me by compelling me to say more. Afterwards, he will wish to see you, I know."

"Please to remember, dear—it astonishes me that you forget it—that I have a responsibility to Mr. Mallard. I have no legal charge of you. With every reason, Mr.

Mallard may reproach me if I countenance what it is impossible for him to approve."

Cecily searched the speaker's face.

"Do you mean," she asked gravely, "that Mr. Mallard will disapprove—what I have done?"

"I can say nothing on that point. But I am very sure that he would not approve of this meeting, if he could know what was happening. I must communicate with him at once. Until he comes, or writes, it is your duty, my dear, to decline this interview. Believe me, it is your duty."

Mrs. Lessingham spoke more earnestly than she ever had done to her niece. Indeed, earnest speech was not frequent upon her lips when she talked with Cecily. In spite of the girl's nature, there had never existed between them warmer relations than those of fondness and interest on one side, and gentleness with respect on the other. Cecily was well aware of this something lacking in their common life; she had wished, not seldom these last two years,

to supply the want, but found herself unable, and grew conscious that her aunt gave all it was in her power to bestow. For this very reason, she found it impossible to utter herself in the present juncture as she could have done to a mother—as she could have done to Miriam; impossible, likewise, to insist on her heart's urgent desire, though she knew not how she should forbear it. To refuse compliance would have been something more than failure in dutifulness; she would have felt it as harshness, and perhaps injustice, to one with whom she involuntarily stood on terms of ceremony.

“May I write a reply to this letter?” she asked, after a silence.

“I had rather you allowed me to speak for you to Mr. Elgar. To write and to see him are the same thing. Surely you can forget yourself for a moment, and regard this from my point of view.”

“I don't know how far you may be led by your sense of responsibility. Remember

that you have insisted to me on your prejudice against Mr. Elgar."

"Vainly enough," returned the other, with a smile. "If you prefer it, I will myself write a line to be given to Mr. Elgar when he calls. Of course, you shall see what I write."

Cecily turned away, and stood in struggle with herself. She had not foreseen a conflict of this kind. Surprise, and probably vexation, she was prepared for; irony, argument, she was quite ready to face; but it had not entered her mind that Mrs. Lessingham would invoke authority to oppose her. Such a step was alien to all the habits of their intercourse, to the spirit of her education. She had deemed herself a woman, and free; what else could result from Mrs. Lessingham's method of training and developing her? This disillusion gave a shock to her self-respect; she suffered from a sense of shame; with difficulty she subdued resentment and impulses yet more rebellious. It was ignoble to debate in this way con-

cerning that of which she could not yet speak formally with her own mind; to contend like an insubordinate school-girl, when the point at issue was the dearest interest of her womanhood.

“I think, aunt,” she said, in a changed voice, speaking as though her opinion had been consulted in the ordinary way, “it will be better for you to see Mr. Elgar—if you are willing to do so.”

“Quite.”

“But I must ask you to let him know exactly why I have not granted his request. You will tell him, if you please, just what has passed between us. If that does not seem consistent with your duty, or dignity, then I had rather you wrote.”

“Neither my duty nor my dignity is likely to suffer, Cecily,” replied her aunt, with an ironical smile. “Mr. Elgar shall know the simple state of the case. And I will forthwith write to Mr. Mallard.”

“Thank you.”

There was no further talk between them.

Mrs. Lessingham sat down to write. With the note-paper before her, and the pen in hand, she was a long time before she began; she propped her forehead, and seemed lost in reflection. Cecily, who stood by the window, glanced towards her several times, and in the end went to her own room.

Mrs. Lessingham's letter was not yet finished when a servant announced Elgar's arrival. He was at once admitted. On seeing who was to receive him, he made an instant's pause before coming forward; there was merely a bow on both sides.

Elgar knew well enough in what mood this lady was about to converse with him. He did not like her, and partly, no doubt, because he had discerned her estimate of his character, his faculties. That she alone was in the room gave him no surprise, though it irritated him and inflamed his impatience. He would have had her speak immediately and to the point, that he might understand his position. Mrs. Lessingham, quite aware of his perfervid state of mind, had pleasure

in delaying. Her real feeling towards him was anything but unfriendly; had it been possible, she would have liked to see much of him, to enjoy his talk. Young men of this stamp amused her, and made strong appeal to certain of her sympathies. But those very sympathies enabled her to judge him with singular accuracy, aided as she was by an outline knowledge of his past. Her genuine affection for Cecily made her, now that the peril had declared itself, his strenuous adversary. For Cecily to marry Reuben Elgar would be a catastrophe, nothing less. She was profoundly convinced of this, and the best elements of her nature came out in the resistance she was determined to make.

A less worthy ground of vexation against Elgar you may readily attribute to her. Skilful in judging men, she had not the same insight where her own sex was concerned, and in the case of Cecily she was misled, or rather misled herself, with curious persistence. Possibly some slight, vague fear had already touched her when she

favoured Mrs. Spence with the description of her "system;" not impossibly she felt the need of reassuring herself by making clear her attitude to one likely to appreciate it. But at that time she had not dreamt of such a sudden downfall of her theoretic edifice; she believed in its strength, and did not doubt of her supreme influence with Cecily. It was not to be wondered at that she felt annoyed with the man who, at a touch, made the elaborate structure collapse like a bubble. She imagined Mrs. Spence's remarks when she came to hear of what had happened, her fine smile to her husband. The occurrence was mortifying.

"Miss Doran has put into my hands a letter she received from you this morning, Mr. Elgar."

Reuben waited. Mrs. Lessingham had not invited him to sit down; she also stood.

"You probably wished me to learn its contents?"

"Yes; I am glad you have read it."

“It didn’t occur to you that Miss Doran might find the task you imposed upon her somewhat trying?”

Elgar was startled. Just as little as Cecily had he pondered the details of the situation; mere frenzy possessed him, and he acted as desire bade. Had Cecily been embarrassed? Was she annoyed at his not proceeding with formality? He had never thought of her in the light of conventional obligations, and even now could not bring himself to do so.

“Did Miss Doran wish me to be told that?” he asked bluntly, in unconsidered phrase.

“Miss Doran’s wish is, that no further step shall be taken by either of you until her guardian, Mr. Mallard, has been communicated with.”

“She will not see me?”

“She thinks it better neither to see you nor to write. I am bound to tell you that this is the result of my advice. Her own intention was to do as you request in this letter.”

“What harm would there have been in that, Mrs. Lessingham? Why mayn’t I see her?”

“I really think Miss Doran must be allowed to act as seems best to her. It is quite enough that I tell you what she has decided.”

“But that is not her decision,” broke out Elgar, moving impetuously. “That is simply the result of your persuasion, of your authority. Why may I not see her?”

“For reasons which would be plain enough to any but a very thoughtless young gentleman. I can say no more.”

Her caustic tone was not agreeable. Elgar winced under it, and had much ado to restrain himself from useless vehemence.

“Do you intend to write to Mr. Mallard to-day?” he asked.

“I will write to-day.”

Expostulation and entreaty seemed of no avail; Elgar recognized the situation, and with a grinding of his teeth kept down the horrible pain he suffered. His only comfort

was that Mallard would assuredly come post-haste ; he would arrive by to-morrow evening. But two days of this misery ! Mrs. Lessingham was gratified with his look as he departed ; she had supplied him with abundant matter for speculation, yet had fulfilled her promise to Cecily.

She finished her letter, then went to Cecily's room. The girl sat unoccupied, and listened without replying. That day she took her meals in private, scarcely pretending to eat. Her face kept its flush, and her hands remained feverishly hot. Till late at night she sat in the same chair, now and then opening a book, but unable to read ; she spoke only a word or two, when it was necessary.

The same on the day that followed. Seldom moving, seldomer speaking ; she suffered and waited.



CHAPTER XI.

THE APPEAL TO AUTHORITY.

“Hic intus homo verus certus optumus recumbo, Publius Octavius Rufus, decurio.”

Mallard stood reading this inscription, graven on an ancient sarcophagus preserved in the cathedral of Amalfi. A fool, probably, that excellent Rufus, but what a happy fool ! Unborn as yet, or to him unknown, the faith that would have bidden him write himself a miserable sinner ; what he deemed himself in life, what perchance his friends and neighbours deemed him, why not declare it upon the marble when he rested from all his virtues ? Perhaps no fool at all, but uttering a simple truth, or represented as doing so, after the high Roman fashion ; then yet more happy.

“ Here lie I, Ross Mallard ; who can say

no good of myself, yet have as little right to say ill ; who had no faith whereby to direct my steps, yet often felt that some such was needful ; who spent all my strength on a task which I knew to be vain ; who suffered much and joyed rarely ; whose happiest day was his last."

Somehow like that would it run, if he were to write his own epitaph at present.

The quiet of the dim sanctuary was helpful to such self-communing. He relished being alone again, and after an hour's brooding had recovered at all events a decent balance of thought, a respite from madness in melancholy.

But he could not employ himself, could not even seek the relief of bodily exertion ; his mind grew sluggish, and threw a lassitude upon his limbs. The greater part of the day he spent in his room at the hotel, merely idle. This time he had no energy to attack himself with adjurations and sarcasms ; body and soul were oppressed with uttermost fatigue, and for a time must lie

torpid. Fortunately he was sure of sleep to-night; the bell of the cathedral might clang its worst, and still not rob him of the just oblivion.

The next day he strayed into the hills, and there in solitude faced the enemy in his heart, bidding misery do its worst. In imagination he followed Reuben Elgar to Naples, saw him speed to Villa Sannazaro, where as likely as not he would meet Cecily. Mallard had no tangible evidence of its being Reuben's desire to see Cecily, but he was none the less convinced that for no other reason had his companion set forth. And jealousy tormented him sorely. It was his first experience of this cruellest passion: what hitherto had been only a name to him, and of ignoble sound, became a disease clutching at his vitals. It taught him fierceness, injustice, base suspicion, brutal conjecture; it taught him that of which all these are constituents—hatred.

But it did not constrain him to any unworthy action. The temptation that

passed through his mind when he looked from the balcony on the carriage that was to convey Elgar, did not return—or only as a bitter desire, impossible of realization. Distant from Naples he must remain, awaiting whatsoever might happen.

Ah, bright, gentle, sweet-faced Cecily ! Inconceivable to her this suffering that lay upon her friend. How it would pain her if she knew of it ! With what sad, wondering tenderness her eyes would regard him ! How kindly would she lay her soft hand in his, and entreat him to be comforted !

If he asked her, would she not give him that hand, to be his always ? Perhaps, perhaps ; in her gentleness she would submit to this change, and do her best to love him. And in return he would give her gruff affection, removal from the life to which she was accustomed, loneliness, his uncertain humours, his dubious reputation. How often must he picture these results, and convince himself of the impossibility of anything of the kind ?

He knew her better than did Mrs. Lessingham ; oh, far better ! He had detected in her deep eyes the sleeping passion, some day to awake with suddenness and make the whole world new to her. He knew how far from impossible it was that Reuben Elgar should be the prince to break her charmed slumber. There was the likeness and the unlikeness ; common to both that temperament of enthusiasm. On the one hand, Cecily with her unsullied maidenhood ; and on the other, Elgar with his reckless experiences—contrasts which so commonly have a mutual attraction. There was the singularity of their meeting after years, and seeing each other in such a new light ; the interest, the curiosity inevitably resulting. What likelihood that any distrust would mingle with Cecily's warmth of feeling, were that feeling once excited ? He knew her too well.

How Mrs. Lessingham regarded Elgar he did not know. He had no confidence in that lady's discretion ; he thought it not

improbable that she would speak of Reuben to Cecily in the very way she should not, making him an impressive figure. Then again, what part was Mrs. Baske likely to have in such a situation? Could she be relied upon to represent her brother unfavourably, with the right colour of unfavourableness? Or was it not rather to be feared that the thought of Cecily's influence might tempt her to encourage what otherwise she must have condemned? He retraced in memory that curious dialogue he had held with Miriam on the drive back from Baiæ; could he gather from it any hints of her probable behaviour?

By a sudden revulsion of mind, Mallard became aware that in the long fit of brooding just gone by he had not been occupied with Cecily at all. Busying his thoughts with Mrs. Baske, he had slipped into a train of meditation already begun on the evening in question, after the drive with her. What was her true history? How had she come to marry the man of whom Elgar's phrases

had produced such a hateful image ? What was the state, in very deed, of her mind at present ? What awaited her in the future ?

It was curious that Mrs. Baske's face was much more recoverable by his mind's eye than Cecily's. In fact, to see Miriam cost him no effort at all ; equally at will, he heard the sound of her voice. There were times when Cecily, her look and utterance, visited him very clearly ; but this was when he did not wish to be reminded of her. If he endeavoured to make her present, as a rule the picturing faculty was irresponsive.

Welcome reverie ! If only he could continue to busy himself with idle speculation concerning the strange young Puritan, and so find relief from the anguish that beset him. Suppose, now, he set himself to imagine Miriam in unlikely situations. What if she somehow fell into poverty, was made absolutely dependent on her own efforts ? Suppose she suffered cruelly what so many women have to suffer—toil, oppression, solitude ; what would she be-

come? Not, he suspected, a meek martyr; anything but that, Miriam Baske. And how magnificent to see her flash out into revolt against circumstances! Then indeed she would be interesting.

Nay, suppose she fell in love—desperately, with grim fate against her? For somehow this came more easily to the fancy than the thought of her loving without obstacle. Presumably she had never loved; her husband was out of the question. Would she pass her life without that experience? One thing could be affirmed with certainty; if she lost her heart to a man, it would not be to a Puritan. He could conceive her being attracted by a strong and somewhat rude fellow, a despiser of conventionalities, without religion, a man of brains and blood; one whose look could overwhelm her with tumultuous scorn, and whose hand, if need be, could crush her life out at a blow. Why not, however, a highly polished gentleman, critical, keen of speech, deeply read, brilliant in conversation, at

once man of the world and scholar? Might not that type have power over her? In a degree, but not so decidedly as the intellectual brute.

Pshaw! what brain-sickness was this! What was he fallen to! Yet it did what nothing else would, amused him for a few minutes in his pain. He recurred to it several times, and always successfully.

Sunday came. This evening would see Elgar back again.

No doubt of his return had yet entered his mind. Whether Reuben would in reality settle to some kind of work was a different question; but of course he would come back, if it were only to say that he had kept his promise, but found he must set off again to some place or other. Mallard dreaded his coming. News of some kind he would bring, and Mallard's need was of silence. If he indeed remained here, the old irritation would revive and go on from day to day. Impossible that they should live together long.

It was pretty certain by what train he would journey from Naples to Salerno ; easy, therefore, to calculate the probable hour of his arrival at Amalfi. When that hour drew near, Mallard set out to walk a short distance along the road, to meet him. What a road it is ! Unlike the Sorrento side of the promontory, the mountains rise suddenly and boldly out of the sea, towering to craggy eminences, moulded and cleft into infinite variety of slope and precipice, bastion and gorge. Cut upon the declivity, often at vast sheer height above the beach, the road follows the curving of the hills. Now and then it makes a deep loop inland, on the sides of an impassable chasm ; and set in each of these recesses is a little town, white-gleaming amid its orchard verdure, with quaint and many-coloured campanile, with the semblance of a remote time. Far up on the heights are other gleaming specks, villages which seem utterly beyond the traffic of man, solitary for ever in sun or mountain mist.

Mallard paid little heed to the things about him ; he walked on and on, watching for a vehicle, listening for the tread of horses. Sometimes he could see the white road-track miles away, and he strained his eyes in observing it. Twice or thrice he was deceived ; a carriage came towards him, and with agitation he waited to see its occupants, only to be disappointed by strange faces.

There are few things more pathetic than persistency in hope due to ignorance of something that has befallen beyond our ken. It is one of those instances of the irony inherent in human fate which move at once to tears and bitter laughter ; the waste of emotion, the involuntary folly, the cruel deception caused by limit of faculties—how they concentrate into an hour or a day the essence of life itself !

He walked on and on ; as well do this as go back and loiter fretfully at the hotel. He got as far as the Capo d' Orso, the headland half-way between Amalfi and Salerno,

and there sat down by the wayside to rest. From this point Salerno was first visible, in the far distance, between the sea and the purple Apennines.

Either Elgar was not coming, or he had lingered long between the two portions of his journey.

Mallard turned back; if the carriage came, it would overtake him. He plodded slowly, the evening falling around him in still loveliness, fragrance from the groves of orange and lemon spread on every motion of the air.

And if he did not come? That must have some strange meaning. In any case, he must surely write. And ten to one his letter would be a lie. What was to be expected of him but a lie?

Monday, Tuesday, and now Wednesday morning. Hitherto not even a letter.

When it was clear that Elgar had disregarded his promise, and, for whatever reason, did not even seek to justify or

excuse himself, there came upon Mallard a strong mood of scorn, which for some hours enabled him to act as though all his anxiety were at an end. He set himself a piece of work; a flash of the familiar energy traversed his mind. He believed that at length his degradation was over, and that, come what might, he could now face it sturdily. Mere self-deception, of course. The sun veiled itself, and hope was as far as ever.

Never before had he utterly lost the power of working. In every struggle he had speedily overcome, and found in work the one unfailing resource. If he were robbed of this, what stay had life for him henceforth? He could not try to persuade himself that his suffering would pass, sooner or later, and time grant him convalescence; the blackness ahead was too profound. He fell again into torpor, and let the days go as they would; he cared not.

But this morning brought him a letter. At the first glance he was surprised by a

handwriting which was not Elgar's ; recollecting himself, he knew it for that of Mrs. Lessingham.

“DEAR MR. MALLARD,

“It grieves me to be obliged to send you disquieting news so soon after your departure from Naples, but I think you will agree with me that I have no choice but to write of something that has this morning come to my knowledge. You have no taste for roundabout phrases, so I will say at once in plain words that Cecily and Mr. Elgar have somehow contrived to fall in love with each other—or to imagine that they have done so, which, as regards results, unfortunately amounts to the same thing. I cannot learn by what process it came about, but I am assured by Cecily, in words of becoming vagueness, that they plighted troth, or something of the kind, yesterday at Pompeii. There was a party of four : Mr. and Mrs. Bradshaw, Cecily, and Mrs. Baske. At Pompeii they were unexpectedly

(so I am told) joined by Mr. Elgar—notwithstanding that he had taken leave of us on Saturday, with the information that he was about to return to you at Amalfi, and there devote himself to literary work of some indefinite kind. Perhaps you have in the mean time heard from him. This morning Cecily received a letter, in which he made peremptory request for an interview; she showed this to me. My duty was plain. I declared the interview impossible, and Cecily gave way on condition that I saw Mr. Elgar, told him why she herself did not appear, and forthwith wrote to you. Our young gentleman was disconcerted when he found that his visit was to be wasted on my uninteresting self. I sent him about his business—only that, unhappily, he has none—bidding him wait till we had heard from you.

“I fancy this will be as disagreeable to you as it is to me. The poor child is in a sad state, much disposed, I fear, to regard me as her ruthless enemy, and like to fall

ill if she be kept long in idle suspense. Do you think it worth while to come to Naples? It is very annoying that your time should be wasted by foolish children. I had given Cecily credit for more sense. For my own part, I cannot think with patience of her marrying Mr. Elgar; or rather, I cannot think of it without dread. We must save her from becoming wise through bitter sorrow, if it can in any way be managed. I hope and trust that nothing may happen to prevent your receiving this letter to-morrow, for I am very uneasy, and not likely to become less so as time goes on.

“Believe me, dear Mr. Mallard,

“Sincerely yours,

“EDITH LESSINGHAM.”

At seven o'clock in the evening, Mallard was in Naples. He did not go to Casa Rolandi, but took a room in one of the musty hotels which overlook the port. When he felt sure that Madame Glück's guests must have dined, he presented himself

at the house and sent his name to Mrs. Lessingham.

She took his hand with warm welcome.

“Thank you for coming so promptly. I have been getting into such a state of nervousness. Cecily keeps her room, and looks ill; I have several times been on the point of sending for the doctor, though it seemed absurd.”

Mallard seated himself without invitation; indeed, he had a difficulty in standing.

“Hasn’t she been out to-day?” he asked, in a voice which might have signified selfish indifference.

“Nor yesterday. Mrs. Spence was here this morning, but Cecily would not see her. I made excuses, and of course said nothing of what was going on. I asked the child if she would like to see Mrs. Baske, but she refused.”

Mallard sat as if he had nothing to say, looking vaguely about the room.

“Have you heard from Mr. Elgar?” Mrs. Lessingham inquired.

"No. I know nothing about him. I haven't been to Casa Rolandi, lest I should meet him. It was better to see you first."

"You were not prepared for this news?"

"His failure to return made me speculate, of course. I suppose they have met several times at Mrs. Baske's?"

"That at once occurred to me, but Cecily assures me that is not so. There is a mystery. I have no idea how they saw each other privately at Pompeii on Monday. But, between ourselves, Mr. Mallard, I can't help suspecting that he had learnt from his sister the particulars of the excursion."

"You think it not impossible that Mrs. Baske connived at their meeting in that way?"

"One doesn't like to use words of that kind, but——"

"I suppose one must use the word that expresses one's meaning," said Mallard, bluntly. "But I didn't think Mrs. Baske was likely to aid her brother for such a

purpose. Have you any reason to think the contrary ? ”

“ None that would carry any weight.”

Mallard paused ; then, with a restless movement on his chair, exclaimed :

“ But what has this to do with the matter ? What has happened has happened, and there’s an end of it. The question is, what ought to be done now ? I don’t see that we can treat Miss Doran like a child.”

Mrs. Lessingham looked at him. She was resting one arm on a table by which she sat, and supporting her forehead with her hand.

“ You propose that things should take their natural course ? ”

“ They will, whether I propose it or not.”

“ And if our next information is that they desire to be married as soon as conveniently may be ? ”

“ That is another matter. They will have no consent of mine to anything of the kind.”

“ You relieve me.”

Mallard looked at her frowningly.

"Miss Doran," he continued, "will not marry Elgar with my consent until she be one and twenty. Then, of course, she may do as she likes."

"You will see Mr. Elgar, and make this clear to him?"

"Very clear indeed," was the grim reply. "As for anything else, why, what can we do? If they insist upon it, I suppose they must see each other—of course, under reasonable restrictions. You cannot make yourself a duenna of melodrama, Mrs. Lessingham."

"Scarcely. But I think our stay at Naples may reasonably be shortened—unless, of course, Mr. Elgar leaves."

"You take it for granted, I see, that Miss Doran will be guided by our judgment," said Mallard, after musing on the last remark.

"I have no fear of that," replied Mrs. Lessingham, with confidence, "if it is made to appear only a question of postponement.

This will be a trifle compared with my task of yesterday morning. You can scarcely imagine how astonished she was at the first hint of opposition."

"I can imagine it very well," said the other, in his throat. "What else could be expected after——" He checked himself on the point of saying something that would have revealed his opinion of Mrs. Lessingham's "system"—his opinion accentuated by unreasoning bitterness. "From all we know of her," were the words he substituted.

"She is more like her father than I had supposed," said Mrs. Lessingham, meditatively.

Mallard stood up.

"You will let her know that I have been here?"

"Certainly."

"She has expressed no wish to see me?"

"None. I had better report to her simply that you have no objection to Mr. Elgar's visits."

“That is all I would say at present. I shall see Elgar to-night. He is still at Casa Rolandi, I take it?”

“That was the address on his letter.”

“Then, good night. By-the-by, I had better give you my address.” He wrote it on a leaf in his pocket-book. “I will see you again in a day or two, when things have begun to clear up.”

“It’s too bad that you should have this trouble, Mr. Mallard.”

“I don’t pretend to like it, but there’s no help.”

And he left Mrs. Lessingham to make her comment on his candour.

Yes, Signor Elgar was in his chamber ; he had entered but a quarter of an hour since. The signor seemed not quite well, unhappily—said Olimpia, the domestic, in her chopped Neapolitan. Mallard vouchsafed no reply. He knocked sharply at the big solid door. There was a cry of “Avanti !” and he entered.

Elgar advanced a few steps. He did not affect to smile, but looked directly at his visitor, who—as if all the pain of the interview were on him rather than the other—cast down his eyes.

“I was expecting you,” said Reuben, without offering his hand.

“So was I you—three days ago.”

“Sit down, and let us talk. I’m ashamed of myself, Mallard. I ought at all events to have written.”

“One would have thought so.”

“Have you seen Mrs. Lessingham?”

“Yes.”

“Then you understand everything. I repeat that I am ashamed of my behaviour to you. For days—since last Saturday—I have been little better than a madman. On Saturday I went to say good-bye to Mrs. Lessingham and her niece ; it was *bonâ fide*, Mallard.”

“In your sense of the phrase. Go on.”

“I tell you, I then meant to leave Naples,” pursued Elgar, who had repeated

this so often to himself, by way of palliation, that he had come to think it true. "It was not my fault that I couldn't when that visit was over. It happened that I saw Miss Doran alone—sat talking with her till her aunt returned."

Mrs. Lessingham had made no mention of this little matter. Hearing of it, Mallard ejaculated mentally, "Idiot!"

"It was all over with me. I broke faith with you—as I should have done with any man; as I should have done if the lives of a hundred people had depended on my coming. I didn't write, because I preferred not to write lies, and if I had told the truth, I knew you would come at once. To be sure, silence might have had the same result, but I had to risk something, and I risked that."

"I marvel at your disinclination to lie."

"What do you mean by saying that?" broke out Elgar, with some warmth, though he yet preserved the tone of self-accusation.

"I mean simply what I say. Go on."

“After all, Mallard, I don’t quite know why you should take this tone with me. If a man falls in love, he thinks of nothing but how to gain his end ; I should think even you can take that for granted. My broken promise is a trifle in view of what caused it.”

“Again, in *your* view. In mine it is by no means a trifle. It distinguishes you from honourable men, that’s all ; a point of some moment, I should think, when your character is expressly under discussion.”

“You mean, of course, that I am not worthy of Cecily. I can’t grant any such conclusion.”

“Let us leave that aside for the present,” said Mallard. “Will you tell me how it came to pass that you met Miss Doran and her companions at Pompeii ? ”

Elgar hesitated ; whereupon the other added quickly :

“If it was with Miss Doran’s anticipation, I want no details.”

“No, it wasn’t.”

Their looks met.

“By chance, then, of course?” said Mallard, sourly.

Elgar spoke on an impulse, leaning forward.

“Look, I won’t lie to you. Miriam told me they were going. I met her that morning, when I was slinking about, and I compelled her to give me her help—sorely against her will. Don’t think ill of her for it, Mallard. I frightened her by my violent manner. I haven’t seen her since; she can’t know what the result has been. None of them at Pompeii suspected—only a moment of privacy; there’s no need to say any more about it.”

Mallard mused over this revelation. He felt inclined to scorn Elgar for making it. It affected him curiously, and at once took a place among his imaginings of Miriam.

“You shall promise me that you won’t betray your knowledge of this,” added Reuben. “At all events, not now. Promise me that. Your word is to be trusted, I know.”

“It’s very unlikely that I should think of

touching on the matter to your sister. I shall make no promise."

"Have you seen Cecily herself?" Elgar asked, leaving the point aside in his eagerness to come to what concerned him more deeply.

"No."

"I have waited for your permission to visit her. Do you mean to refuse it?"

"No. If you call to-morrow morning, you will be admitted. Mrs. Lessingham is willing that you should see her niece in private."

"Hearty thanks for that, Mallard! We haven't shaken hands yet, you remember. Forgive me for treating you so ill."

He held out his hand cordially, and Mallard could not refuse it, though he would rather have thrust his fingers among red coals than feel that hot pressure.

"I believe I can be grateful," pursued Elgar, in a voice that quivered with transport. "I will do my best to prove it."

"Let us speak of things more to the

point. What result do you foresee of this meeting to-morrow ? ”

The other hesitated.

“ I shall ask Cecily when she will marry me.”

“ You may do so, of course, but the answer cannot depend upon herself alone.”

“ What delay do you think necessary ? ”

“ Until she is of age, and her own mistress,” replied Mallard, with quiet decision.

“ Impossible ! What need is there to wait all that time ? ”

“ Why, there is this need, Elgar,” returned the other, more vigorously than he had yet spoken. “ There is need that you should prove to those who desire Miss Doran’s welfare that you are something more than a young fellow fresh from a life of waste and idleness and everything that demonstrates or tends to untrustworthiness. It seems to me that a couple of years or so is not an over-long time for this, all things considered.”

Elgar kept silent.

“ You would have seen nothing objectionable in immediate marriage ? ” said Mallard.

“ It is useless to pretend that I should.”

“ Not even from the point of view of Mrs. Lessingham and myself ? ”

“ You yourself have never spoken plainly about such things in my hearing ; but I find you in most things a man of your time. And it doesn't seem to me that Mrs. Lessingham is exactly conventional in her views.”

“ You imagine yourself worthy of such a wife at present ? ”

“ Plainly, I do. It would be the merest hypocrisy if I said anything else. If Cecily loves me, my love for her is at least as strong. If we are equal in that, what else matters ? I am not going to cry *Peccavi* about the past. I have lived, and you know what that means in my language. In what am I inferior as a man to Cecily as a woman ? Would you have me snivel, and talk about my impurity and her angelic qualities ? You know that you would

despise me if I did—or any other man who used the same empty old phrases.”

“I grant you that,” replied Mallard, deliberately. “I believe I am no more superstitious with regard to these questions than you are, and I want to hear no cant. Let us take it on more open ground. Were Cecily Doran my daughter, I would resist her marrying you to the utmost of my power—not simply because you have lived laxly, but because of my conviction that the part of your life is to be a pattern of the whole. I have no faith in you—no faith in your sense of honour, in your stability, not even in your mercy. Your wife will be, sooner or later, one of the unhappiest of women. Thinking of you in this way, and being in the place of a parent to Cecily, am I doing my duty or not in insisting that she shall not marry you hastily, that even in her own despite she shall have time to study you and herself, that she shall only take the irrevocable step when she clearly knows that it is done on

her own responsibility? You may urge what you like; I am not so foolish as to suppose you capable of consideration for others in your present state of mind. I, however, shall defend myself from the girl's reproaches in after-years. There will be no marriage until she is twenty-one."

A silence of some duration followed. Elgar sat with bent head, twisting his moustaches. At length—

"I believe you are right, Mallard. Not in your judgment of me, but in your practical resolve."

Mallard examined him from under his eyebrows.

"You are prepared to wait?" he asked, in an uncertain voice.

"Prepared, no. But I grant the force of your arguments. I will try to bring myself to patience."

Mallard sat unmoving. His legs were crossed, and he held his soft felt hat crushed together in both his hands. Elgar glanced at him once or twice, expecting him to speak, but the other was mute.

“Your judgment of me,” Elgar resumed, “is harsh and unfounded. I don’t know how you have formed it. You know nothing of what it means to me to love such a girl as Cecily. Here I have found my rest. It supplies me with no new qualities, but it strengthens those I have. You picture me being unfaithful to Cecily—deserting her, becoming brutal to her? There must be a strange prejudice in your mind to excite such images.” He examined Mallard’s face. “Some day I will remind you of your prophecies.”

Mallard regarded him, and spoke at length, in a strangely jarring, discordant voice.

“I said that hastily. I make no prophecies. I wished to say that those seemed to me the probabilities.”

“Thank you for the small mercy, at all events,” said Elgar, with a laugh.

“What do you intend to do?” Mallard proceeded to ask, changing his position.

“I can make no plans yet. I have pre-

tended to only too often. You have no objection to my remaining here?"

"You must take your own course—with the understanding to which we have come."

"I wish I could make you look more cheerful, Mallard. I owe it you, for you have given me more gladness than I can utter."

"You can do it."

"How?"

"See her to-morrow morning, and then go back to England, and make yourself some kind of reputable existence."

"Not yet. That is asking too much. Not so soon."

"As you please. We understand each other on the main point."

"Yes. Are you going back to Amalfi?"

"I don't know."

They talked for a few minutes more, in short sentences of this kind, but did not advance beyond the stage of mutual forbearance. Mallard lingered, as though not sure that he had fulfilled his mission. In the end he went away abruptly.



CHAPTER XII.

ON THE HEIGHTS.

IN vain, at each meal, did Clifford Marsh await Cecily's appearance. A trifling indisposition kept her to her room, was Mrs. Lessingham's reply to sympathetic inquiries. Mr. and Mrs. Bradshaw, who were seriously making their preparations for journeying northward, held private talk concerning the young lady, and felt they would like to stay a week longer, just to see if their suspicions would be confirmed. Mrs. Denyer found it difficult to assume the becoming air when she put civil questions to Mrs. Lessingham, for she was now assured that to Miss Doran was attributable the alarming state of things between Clifford and Madeline; Marsh would never have

been so intractable but for this new element in the situation. Madeline herself, on the other hand, was a model of magnanimity ; in Clifford's very hearing, she spoke of Cecily with tender concern, and then walked past her recreant admirer with her fair head in a pose of conscious grace.

Even Mr. Musselwhite, at the close of the second day, grew aware that the table lacked one of its ornaments. It was his habit now—a new habit came as a blessing of Providence to Mr. Musselwhite—on passing into the drawing-room after dinner, to glance towards a certain corner, and, after slow, undecided “tackings,” to settle in that direction. There sat Barbara Denyer. Her study at present was one of the less-known works of Silvio Pellico, and as Mr. Musselwhite approached, she looked up with an air of absorption. He was wont to begin conversation with the remark, flatteringly toned, “Reading Italian as usual, Miss Denyer?” but this evening a new subject had been suggested to him.

"I hope Miss Doran is not seriously unwell, Miss Denyer?"

"Oh, I think not."

Mr. Musselwhite reflected, stroking his whiskers in a gentlemanly way.

"One misses her," was his next remark.

"Yes, so much. She is so charming—don't you think, Mr. Musselwhite?"

"Very." He now plucked at the whiskers uneasily. "Oh yes, very."

Barbara smiled and turned her attention to the book, as though she could spare no more time. Mr. Musselwhite, dimly feeling that this topic demanded no further treatment, racked his brains for something else to say. He was far towards Lincolnshire, when a rustle of the pages under Barbara's finger gave him a happy inspiration.

"I don't know whether you would care to see English papers now and then, Miss Denyer? I always have quite a number. The *Field*, for instance, and——"

"You are very kind, I don't read much English, but I shall be glad to see anything you like to bring me."

Mrs. Denyer was not wholly without consolation in her troubles about Clifford Marsh.

On the following morning, as she and her daughters were going out, they came face to face with a gentleman who was announcing to the servant his wish to see Miss Doran. Naturally they all glanced at him. Would he be admitted? With much presence of mind, Madeline exclaimed :

“Oh dear, mamma! I have forgotten that letter. Please wait for me; I won't be a minute.”

And she disappeared, the others moving out on to the staircase. When Madeline rejoined them, it was with the intelligence that the visitor *had* been admitted.

“Who can he be?”

“Rather a strange-looking person.”

“Miss Doran cannot be ill. She has no brother. What an odd thing!”

They walked on, close serried, murmuring to each other discreetly. . . .

For several minutes there had been per-

fect stillness in the room, a hush after the music of low, impassioned voices. It was broken, yet scarcely broken, by the sound of lips touching lips—touching to part sweetly, touching again to part more slowly, more sweetly still.

“They will not influence you against me?”

“Never! never!”

“They will try, Cecily. You will hear endless things to my disadvantage—things that I cannot contradict if you ask me.”

“I care for nothing, Reuben. I am yours for ever and ever, hear what I may, happen what may!”

“Don’t call me by my hateful name, dearest. We will find some other, if I must have a name for you.”

“Why, that is like Romeo!”

“So it is; I wish I had no worse than Romeo’s reason. I had rather have had the vulgarest Anglo-Saxon name than this Jewish one. Happily, I need have no fear in telling you that; *you* are no Puritan.”

“As little as a girl could be.” She

laughed in her happiness. "Have you the same dislike for your sister's name?"

"Just the same. I believe it partly explains her life."

"She will not be against us, though?"

"Neither for nor against, I am afraid. Yet I have to thank her for the meeting with you at Pompeii. Why haven't you asked me how I came there?"

"I never thought to ask. It seemed so natural. I longed for you, and you stood before me. I could almost believe that my longing had power to bring you, so strong it was. But tell me."

He did so, and again they lost themselves in rapturous dreamland.

"Do you think Mr. Mallard will wish to see me?" she asked timidly.

"I can't be sure. I half think not."

"Yet I half wish he would. I should find it strange and a little difficult, but he couldn't be harsh with me. I think it might do good if he came to see me—in a day or two."

“On what terms have you always been with him? How does he behave to you?”

“Oh, you know him. He still looks upon me rather too much as a child, and he seems to have a pleasure in saying odd, half-rude things; but we are excellent friends—or have been. Such a delightful day as we had at Baiæ! I have always liked him.”

“At Baiæ? You didn’t go alone with him?”

“No; Miriam was there and Mr. Spence. We found him dreaming at Pozzuoli, and carried him off in the boat with us.”

“He never thought much of me, and now he hates me.”

“No; that is impossible.”

“If you had heard him speaking to me last night, you would think differently. He makes it a crime that I should love you.”

“I don’t understand it.”

“What’s more, he has feared this ever since I came; I feel sure of it. When I was coming back from Pompeii, he took me

with him to Amalfi all but by force. He dreaded my returning and seeing you."

"But why should he think of such a thing?"

"Why?"

Elgar led her a few paces, until they stood before a mirror.

"Don't look at me. The other face, which is a little paler than it should be."

She hid it against him.

"But you don't love me for my face only? You will see others who have more beauty."

"Perhaps so. Mallard hopes so, in the long time we shall have to wait."

She fixed startled eyes on him.

"He cannot wish me so ill—he cannot! That would be unlike him."

"He wishes *you* no ill, be sure of it."

"Oh, you haven't spoken to him as you should! You haven't made him understand you. Let me speak to him for you."

"Cecily."

"Dearest?"

“Suppose he doesn’t wish to understand me. Have you never thought, when he has pretended to treat you as a child, that there might be some reason for it? Did it never occur to you that, if he spoke too roughly, it might be because he was afraid of being too gentle?”

“Never! That thought has never approached my mind. You don’t speak in earnest?”

Why could he not command his tongue? Why have suggested this to her imagination? He did not wholly mean to say it, even to the last moment; but unwisdom, as so often, overcame him. It was a way of defending himself; he wished to imply that Mallard had a powerful reason for assailing his character. He had been convinced since last night that Mallard was embittered by jealousy, and he half credited the fear lest jealousy might urge to the use of any weapons against him; he was tempted by the satisfaction of putting Cecily on her guard against interested

motives. But he should not have troubled her soul with such suspicions. He read on her face how she was pained, and her next words proved his folly.

“If you are right, I can never speak to him as I might have done. It alters everything; it makes everything harder. You are mistaken.”

“I may be. Let us hope I am.”

“How I wish I had never seen that possibility! I cannot believe it; yet it will prevent me from looking honestly in his face, as I always have done.”

“Forget it. Let us speak only of ourselves.”

But she was troubled, and Elgar, angry with himself, spoke impatiently.

“In pity for him, you would love me less. I see that.”

“You are not yet satisfied? You find new ways of forcing me to say that I love you. Seem to distrust me, that I may say it over and over; make me believe you really doubt if I can be constant, just that

I may hear what my heart says in its distress, and repeat it all to you. Be a little unkind to me, that I may show how your unkindness would wound me, and may entreat you back into your own true self. You can do nothing, say nothing, but I will make it afford new proofs of how I love you."

"I had rather you made yourself less dear to me. The time will be so long. How can I live through it?"

"Will it not help you a little to help me? To know that you are unhappy would make it so much longer to me, my love."

"It will be hell to live away from you! I cannot make myself another man. If you knew what I have suffered only in these two days!"

"There was uncertainty."

"Uncertainty? Then what certainty could I ever have? Every hour spent at a distance from you will be full of hideous misgivings. Remember that every one will be doing the utmost to part us."

“Let them do the utmost twice over! You must have faith in me. Look into my eyes. Is there no assurance, no strength for you? Do they look too happy? That is because you are still here; time enough for sadness when you are gone. Oh, you think too humbly of yourself! Having loved you, and known your love, what else can the world offer me to live for?”

“Wherever you are, I must come often.”

“Indeed you must, or for me too the burden will be heavier than I can bear.”

As the Denyers were coming home, it surprised them to pass, at a little distance from the house, Clifford Marsh in conversation with the gentleman who had called upon Miss Doran. Madeline, exercising her new privilege of perfect *sang-froid*, took an opportunity not long after to speak to Clifford in the drawing-room.

“Who was the gentleman we saw you with?”

“I met him at Pompeii, but didn’t know

his name till to-day. He's asked me to dine with him."

"He is a friend of Miss Doran's, I believe?"

"I believe so."

"You accepted his invitation?"

"Yes; I am always willing to make a new acquaintance."

"A liberal frame of mind. Did he give you news of Miss Doran's health?"

"No."

He smiled mysteriously, only to appear at his ease; and Madeline, smiling also, turned away.

Cecily reappeared this evening at the dinner-table. She was changed; Madame Glück and her guests were not again to behold the vision to which their eyes had become accustomed; that supremacy of simple charm which some of them had recognized as English girlhood at its best, had given place to something less intelligible, less instant in its attractiveness. Perhaps the

climate of Naples was proving not well suited to her.

After dinner, she and Mrs. Lessingham at once went to their private room. Cecily sat down to write a letter. When she moved, as if the letter were finished, her aunt looked up from a newspaper.

"I've been thinking, Cecily. Suppose we go over to Capri for a change?"

"I am quite willing, aunt."

"I think Mr. Elgar has not been there yet. He might accompany us."

Unprepared for this, Cecily murmured an assent.

"Do you know how much longer he thinks of staying in Italy?"

"We haven't spoken of it."

"Has he given up his literary projects?"

"I'm afraid we didn't speak of that either."

"Shall you be satisfied if he continues to live quite without occupation?"

"I don't for a moment think he purposes that."

“And yet it will certainly be the case as long as he remains here—or wherever else we happen to be living.”

Mrs. Lessingham allowed her to ponder this for a few minutes. Then she resumed the train of thought.

“Have you had leisure yet to ask yourself, my dear, what use you will make of the great influence you have acquired over Mr. Elgar’s mind?”

“That is not quite the form my thoughts would naturally take, aunt,” Cecily replied, with gentleness.

“Yet may it not be the form they should? You are accustomed to think for yourself to a greater extent than girls whose education has been more ordinary; you cannot take it ill if I remind you now of certain remarks I have made on Mr. Elgar lately, and remind you also that I am not alone in my view of him. Don’t fear that I shall say anything unkind; but if you feel equal to a woman’s responsibilities, you must surely exercise a woman’s good sense.

Let us say nothing more than that Mr. Elgar has fallen into habits of excessive indolence ; doesn't it seem to you that you might help him out of them ? ”

“ I think he may not need help as you understand it, now.”

“ My dear, he needs it perhaps five hundred times more than he did before. If you decline to believe me, I shall be only too much justified by your experience hereafter.”

“ What would you have me do ? ”

“ What must very soon occur to your own excellent wits, Cecily—for I won't give up all my pride in you. Mr. Elgar should, of course, go back to England, and do something that becomes him ; he must decide what. Let him have a few days with us in Capri ; then go, and so far recommend himself in our eyes. No one can make him see that this is what his dignity—if nothing else—demands, except yourself. Think of it, dear.”

Cecily did think of it, long and anxiously.

Thanks to Elgar, her meditations had a dark background such as her own fancy would never have supplied. . . .

He knew not how sadly the image of him had been blurred in Cecily's mind, the man who lay that night in his room overlooking the port. Whether such ignorance were for his aid or his disadvantage, who shall venture to say?

To a certain point, we may follow with philosophic curiosity, step by step, the progress of mental anguish, but when that point is passed, analysis loses its interest; the vocabulary of pain has exhausted itself, the phenomena already noted do but repeat themselves with more rapidity, with more intensity—detail is lost in the mere sense of throes. Perchance the mind is capable of suffering worse than the fiercest pangs of hopeless love combined with jealousy; one would not pretend to put a limit to the possibilities of human woe; but for Mallard, at all events this night did the black flood of misery reach high-water mark.

What joy in the world that does not represent a counterbalance of sorrow? What blessedness poured upon one head but some other must therefore lie down under malediction? We know that with the uttermost of happiness there is wont to come a sudden blending of troublous humour. May it not be that the soul has conceived a subtle sympathy with that hapless one but for whose sacrifice its own elation were impossible?





CHAPTER XIII.

ECHO AND PRELUDE.

AT Villa Sannazaro, the posture of affairs was already understood. When Eleanor Spence, casually calling at the *pension*, found that Cecily was unable to receive visitors, she at the same time learnt from Mrs. Lessingham to what this seclusion was due. The ladies had a singular little conversation, for Eleanor was inwardly so amused at this speedy practical comment on Mrs. Lessingham's utterances of the other day, that with difficulty she kept her countenance; while Mrs. Lessingham herself, impelled to make the admission without delay, that she might exhibit a philosophic acceptance of fact, had much ado to hide her chagrin beneath the show of half-cynical frankness that became a woman of

the world. Eleanor — passably roguish within the limits of becoming mirth—acted the scene to her husband, who laughed shamelessly. Then came explanations between Eleanor and Miriam.

The following day passed without news, but on the morning after, Miriam had a letter from Cecily ; not a long letter, nor very effusive, but telling all that was to be told. And it ended with a promise that Cecily would come to the villa that afternoon. This was communicated to Eleanor.

“Where’s Mallard, I wonder?” said Spence, when his wife came to talk to him. “Not, I suspect, at the old quarters. It would be like him to go off somewhere without a word. Confound that fellow Elgar !”

“I’m half disposed to think that it serves Mr. Mallard right,” was Eleanor’s remark.

“Well, for heartlessness commend me to a comfortable woman.”

“And for folly commend me to a strong-minded man.”

“Pooh ! He’ll growl and mutter a little, and then get on with his painting.”

“If I thought so, my liking for him would diminish. I hope he is tearing his hair.”

“I shall go seek him.”

“Do ; and give my best love to him, poor fellow.”

Cecily came alone. She was closeted with Miriam for a long time, then saw Eleanor. Spence purposely kept away from home.

Dante lay unread, as well as the other books which Eleanor placed insidiously in her cousin’s room. Letters lay unanswered—among them several relating to the proposed new chapel at Bartles. How did Miriam employ herself during the hours that she spent alone ?

Not seldom, in looking back upon her childhood and maidenhood.

Imagine a very ugly, cubical, brick house of two storeys, in a suburb of

Manchester. It stands a few yards back from the road. On one side, it is parted by a row of poplars from several mean cottages; on the other, by a narrow field from a house somewhat larger and possibly a little uglier than itself. Its outlook, over the highway, is on to a tract of country just being broken up by builders, beyond which a conglomerate of factories, with chimneys ever belching heavy fumes, closes the view; its rear windows regard a scrubby meadow, grazed generally by broken-down horses, with again a liminary prospect of vast mills.

Imagine a Sunday in this house. Half an hour later than on profane days, Mrs. Elgar descends the stairs. She is a lady of middle age, slight, not ungraceful, handsome; the look of pain about her forehead is partly habitual, but the consciousness of Sunday intensifies it. She moves without a sound. Entering the breakfast-room, she finds there two children, a girl and a boy, both attired in new-seeming garments which are obviously stiff and uncomfortable. The little

girl sits on an uneasy chair, her white-stockinged legs dangling, on her lap a large copy of "Pilgrim's Progress;" the boy is half reclined on a shiny sofa, his hands in his pockets, on his face an expression of discontent. The table is very white, very cold, very uninviting.

Ten minutes later appears the master of the house, shaven, also in garments that appear new and uncomfortable, glancing hither and thither with preoccupied eyes. There is some talk in a low voice between the little girl and her mother; then the family seat themselves at table silently. Mr. Elgar turns a displeased look on the boy, and says something in a harsh voice which causes the youngster to straighten himself, curl his lip precociously, and thereafter preserve a countenance of rebellion subdued by fear. His father eats very little, speaks scarcely at all, but thinks, thinks—and most assuredly not of sacred subjects.

Breakfast over, there follows an hour of

indescribable dreariness, until the neighbourhood begins to sound with the clanging of religious bells. Mr. Elgar has withdrawn to a little room of his own, where perhaps he gives himself up to meditation on the duties of a Christian parent, though his incredulous son has ere now had a glimpse at the door, and observed him in the attitude of letter-writing. Mrs. Elgar moves about silently, the pain on her brow deepening as chapel-time approaches. At length the boy and girl go upstairs to be "got ready," which means that they indue other garments yet more uncomfortable than those they already wear. This process over, they descend again to the breakfast-room, and again sit there, waiting for the dread moment of departure. The boy is more rebellious than usual; he presently drums with his feet, and even begins to whistle, very low, a popular air. His sister looks at him, first with astonished reproach, then in dread.

Satis superque. Again and again Miriam

revived these images of the past. And the more she thought of herself as a child, the less was she pleased with what her memory presented. How many instances came back to her of hypocrisy before her father or mother, hypocrisy which, strangely enough, she at the time believed a merit, though perfectly aware of her own insincerity! How many a time had she suffered from the restraints imposed upon her, and then secretly allowed herself indulgences, and then again persuaded herself that by severe attention to formalities she blotted out her sin!

But the worst was when Cecily Doran came to live in the house. Cecily was careless in religion, had been subjected to no proper severity, had not been taught to probe her conscience. At once Miriam assumed an attitude of spiritual pride—the beginning of an evil which was to strengthen its hold upon her through years. She would be an example to the poor little heathen; she talked with her unctuously; she excited

herself, began to find a pleasure in asceticism, and drew the susceptible girl into the same way. They would privately appoint periods of fasting, and at several successive meals irritate their hunger by taking only one or two morsels ; when faintness came upon them, they gloried in the misery.

And from that stage of youth survived memories far more painful than those of childhood. Miriam shut her mind against them.

Her marriage came about in the simplest way ; nothing easier to understand, granted these circumstances. The friends of the family were few, and all people of the same religious sect, of the same commercial sphere. Miriam had never spoken with a young man whom she did not in her heart despise ; the one or two who might possibly have been tempted to think of her as a desirable wife, were repelled by her austerity. She had now a character to support ; she had made herself known for severe devotion to the things of the spirit. In her poor little world

she could not submit to be less than pre-eminent, and only by the way of religion was pre-eminence to be assured. When the wealthy and pious manufacturer sought her hand, she doubted for a while, but was in the end induced to consent by the reflection that not only would she be freer, but at the same time enjoy a greatly extended credit and influence. Her pride silenced every other voice.

Religious hypocrisy is in our day a very rare thing ; so little is to be gained by it. To be sure, the vast majority of English people are constantly guilty of hypocritical practices, but that, as a rule, is mere testimony to the rootedness of their orthodox faith. Mr. Elgar, shutting himself up between breakfast and chapel to write business letters—which he pre- or post-dated—was ignoble enough, but not therefore a hypocrite. Had a fatal accident happened to one of his family whilst he was thus employed, you would not have succeeded in persuading his conscience that the sin and the calamity

were unconnected. His wife had never admitted a doubt of its being required by the immutable law of God that she should be sad and severe on Sunday, that Reuben should be sternly punished for whistling on that day, that little Miriam should be rewarded when she 'went through the long services with unnatural stillness and demureness. Nor was Miriam herself a hypocrite when, mistress of Redbeck House, she began to establish her reputation and authority throughout dissenting Bartles.

Her instruction had been rigidly sectarian. Whatever she studied was represented to her from the point of view of its relation to Christianity as her teachers understood it. The Christian faith was alone of absolute significance ; all else that the mind of man could contain was of more or less importance as more or less connected with that single interest. To the time of her marriage, her outlook upon the world was incredibly restricted. She had never read a book that would not pass her mother's censorship ; she

had never seen a work of art; she had never heard anything but “sacred” music; she had never perused a journal; she had never been to an entertainment—unless the name could be given to a magic-lantern exhibition of views in Palestine, or the like. Those with whom she associated had gone through a similar training, and knew as little of life.

She had heard of “infidelity;” yes. Live as long as she might, she would never forget one dreadful day when, in a quarrel with his mother, Reuben uttered words which signified hatred and rejection of all he had been taught to hold divine; Mrs. Elgar’s pallid, speechless horror; the cruel chastisement inflicted on the lad by his father;—she could never look back on it all without sickness of heart. Thenceforth, her brother and his wild ways embodied for her that awful thing, infidelity. At the age which Cecily Doran had now attained, Miriam believed that there were only a few men living so unspeakably wicked as to

repudiate Christianity ; one or two of these, she had learnt from the pulpit, were “ men of science,” a term which to this day fell on her ears with sinister sound.

Thus prepared for the duties of wife, mother, and leader in society, she shone forth upon Bartles. Her husband, essentially a coarse man, did his utmost, though unconsciously, to stimulate her pride and supply her with incentives to unworthy ambition. He was rich, and boasted of it vulgarly ; he was ignorant, and vaunted the fact, thanking Heaven that for him the purity of religious conviction had never been endangered by the learning that leads astray ; he was proud of possessing a young and handsome wife, and for the first time evoked in her a personal vanity. Day by day was it—most needlessly—impressed upon Miriam that she must regard herself as the chief lady in Bartles, and omit no duty appertaining to such a position. She had an example to set ; she was chosen as a support of religion.

Most happily, the man died. Had he remained her consort for ten years, the story of Miriam's life would have been one of those that will scarcely bear dwelling upon, too repulsive, too heart-breaking ; a few words of bitterness, of ruth, and there was an end of it. His death was like the removal of a foul burden that polluted her and gradually dragged her down. Nor was it long before she herself understood it in this way, though dimly and uncertainly. She found herself looking on things with eyes which somehow had a changed power of vision. With remarkable abruptness, certain of her habits fell from her, and she remembered them only with distaste, even with disgust. And one day she said to herself passionately that never would she wed again—never, never ! She was experiencing for the first time in her life a form of liberty.

Not that her faith had received any shock. To her undeveloped mind every tenet in which she had been instructed was

still valid. This is the point to note. Her creed was a habit of the intellect; she held it as she did the knowledge of the motions of the earth. She had never reflected upon it, for in everything she heard or read this intellectual basis was presupposed. With doctrinal differences her reasoning faculty was familiar, and with her to think of religion was to think of the points at issue between one church and another—always, moreover, with prejudice in favour of her own.

But the external results of her liberty began to be of importance. She came into frequent connection with her cousin Eleanor; she saw more than hitherto of the Bradshaws' family life; she had business transactions; she read newspapers; she progressed slowly towards some practical acquaintance with the world.

Miriam knew the very moment when the thought of making great sacrifices to build a new chapel for Bartles had first entered her mind. One of her girl friends had just

married, and was come to live in the neighbourhood. The husband, Welland by name, was wealthier and of more social importance than Mr. Baske had been ; it soon became evident that Mrs. Welland, who also aspired to prominence in religious life, would be a formidable rival to the lady of Redbeck House. On the occasion of some local meeting, Miriam felt this danger keenly ; she went home in dark mood, and the outcome of her brooding was the resolve in question.

She had not inherited all her husband's possessions ; indeed, there fell to her something less than half his personal estate. For a time, this had not concerned her ; now she was beginning to think of it occasionally with discontent. For this her conscience reproached her. Like reproach did she suffer for the jealousy and envy excited in her by Mrs. Welland's arrival. A general uneasiness of mind was gradually induced, and the chapel-building project, with singular confusion of motives, repre-

sented to her at once a worldly ambition and a discipline for the soul. It was a long time before she spoke of it, and in the interval she suffered more and more from a vague mental unrest.

Letters were coming to her from Cecily. Less by what they contained than by what they omitted, she knew that Cecily was undergoing a great change. Miriam put at length certain definite questions, and the answers she received were unsatisfactory, alarming. The correspondence became a distinct source of trouble. Not merely on Cecily's account; she was led by it to think of the world beyond her horizon, and to conceive dissatisfactions such as had never taken form to her.

Her physical health began to fall off; she had seasons of depression, during which there settled upon her superstitious fears. Ascetic impulses returned, and by yielding to them she established a new cause of bodily weakness. And the more she suffered, the more intolerable to her grew

the thought of resigning her local importance. Her pride, whenever irritated, showed itself in ways which exposed her to the ridicule of envious acquaintances. At length Bartles was surprised with an announcement of what had so long been in her mind; a newspaper paragraph made known, as if with authority, the great and noble work Mrs. Baske was about to undertake. For a day or two Miriam enjoyed the excitement this produced—the inquiries, the felicitations, the reports of gossip. She held her head more firmly than ever; she seemed of a sudden to be quite re-established in health.

Another day or two, and she was lying seriously ill—so ill that her doctor summoned aid from Manchester.

What a distance between those memories, even the latest of them, and this room in Villa Sannazaro! Its foreign aspect, its brightness, its comfort, the view from the windows, had from the first worked upon her with subtle influences of which she was

unconscious. By reason of her inexperience of life, it was impossible for Miriam to analyze her own being, and note intelligently the modifications it underwent. Introspection meant to her nothing but debates held with conscience—a technical conscience, made of religious precepts. Original reflection, independent of these precepts, was to her very simply a form of sin, a species of temptation for which she had been taught to prepare herself. With anxiety, she found herself slipping away from that firm ground whence she was wont to judge all within and about her; more and more difficult was it to keep in view that sole criterion in estimating the novel impressions she received. To review the criterion itself was still beyond her power. She suffered from the conviction that trials foreseen were proving too strong for her. Whenever her youth yielded to the allurements of natural joys, there followed misery of penitence. Not that Miriam did in truth deem it a sin to enjoy the sunshine and the

breath of the sea and the beauty of mountains (though such delights might become excessive, like any other, and so veil temptation), but she felt that for one in her position of peril there could not be too strict a watch kept upon the pleasures that were admitted. Hence she could never forget herself in pleasure ; her attitude must always be that of one on guard.

The name of Italy signified perilous enticement, and she was beginning to feel it. The people amid whom she lived were all but the avowed scorners of her belief, and she was beginning to like their society. Every letter she wrote to Bartles seemed to her despatched on a longer journey than the one before ; her paramount interests were fading, fading ; she could not exert herself to think of a thousand matters which used to have the power to keep her active all day long. The chapel-plans were hidden away ; she durst not go to the place where they would have met her eye.

She suffered in her pride. On landing

at Naples, she had imagined that her position among the Spences and their friends would not be greatly different from that she had held at Bartles. They were not "religious" people; all the more must they respect her, feeling rebuked in her presence. The chapel project would enhance her importance. How far otherwise had it proved! They pitied her, compassionated her lack of knowledge, of opportunities. With the perception of this, there came upon her another disillusion. In classing the Spences with people who were not "religious," she had understood them as lax in the observance of duties which at all events they recognized as such. By degrees she learnt that they were very far from holding the same views as herself concerning religious obligation; they were anything but conscience-smitten in the face of her example. Was it, then, possible that persons who lived in a seemly manner could be sceptics, perhaps "infidels"? What of Cecily Doran? She had not dared

to ask Cecily face to face how far her disbelief went; the girl seemed to have no creed but that of worldly delight. How had she killed her conscience in so short a time? Obviously, her views were those of Mrs. Lessingham; probably those of Mr. Mallard. Were these people strange and dreadful exceptions, or did they represent a whole world of which she had not suspected the existence?

Yes, she was beginning to feel the allure-ment of Italy. Instead of sitting turned away from her windows when musing, she often passed an hour with her eyes on the picture they framed, content to be idle, satisfied with form and colour, not thinking at all. Habits of personal idleness crept upon her; she seldom cared to walk, but found pleasure in the motion of a carriage, and lay back on the cushions, instead of sitting quite upright as at first. She began to wish for music; the sound of Eleanor's piano would tempt her to make an excuse for going into that room, and then she would

remain, listening. The abundant fruits of the season became a temptation to her palate ; she liked to see shops and stalls overflowing with the vineyard's delicious growth.

She knew for the first time the seduction of books. From what unutterable weariness had she been saved when she assented to Eleanor's proposal and began to learn Italian ! First there was the fear lest she should prove slow at acquiring, suffer yet another fall from her dignity ; but this apprehension was soon removed. She had a brain, and could use it ; Eleanor's praise fell upon her ears delightfully. Then there was that little volume of English verse which Eleanor left on the table ; its name, "The Golden Treasury," made her imagine it of religious tone, and she was undeceived in glancing through it. Poetry had hitherto made no appeal to her ; she did not care much for the little book. But one day Cecily caught it up in delight, and read to her for half an hour ; she affected indiffer-

ence, but had in reality learnt something, and thereafter read for herself.

The two large mirrors in her room had, oddly enough, no unimportant part among the agencies working for her development. It was almost inevitable that, in moving about, she should frequently regard her own figure. From being something of an annoyance, this necessity at length won attractiveness, till she gazed at herself far oftener than she need have done. As for her face, she believed it passable, perhaps rather more than that; but the attire that had possessed distinction at Bartles looked very plain, to say the least, in the light of her new experience. One day she saw herself standing side by side with Cecily, and her eyes quickly turned away.

To what was she sinking !

But Dante lay unopened, together with the English books. Miriam had spent a day or two of alternate languor and irritableness, unable to attend to anything

serious. Just now she had in her hand Cecily's letter, the letter which told of what had happened. There was no reason for referring to it again ; this afternoon Cecily herself had been here. But Miriam read over the pages, and dwelt upon them.

At dinner, no remark was made on the subject that occupied the minds of all three. Afterwards they sat together, as usual, and Eleanor played. In one of the silences, Miriam turned to Spence and asked him if he had seen Mr. Mallard.

"Yes ; I found him after a good deal of going about," replied the other, glad to have done with artificial disregard of the subject.

"Does he know that they are going to Capri ?"

"He evidently hadn't heard of it. I suppose he'll have a note from Mrs. Lesingham this evening or to-morrow."

Miriam waited a little, then asked :

"What is his own wish ? What does he think ought to be arranged ?"

“Just what Cecily told you,” interposed Eleanor, before her husband could reply.

“I thought he might have spoken more freely to Edward.”

“Well,” answered Spence, “he is strongly of opinion that Reuben ought to go to England very soon. But I suppose Cecily told you that as well?”

“She seemed to be willing. But why doesn’t Mr. Mallard speak to her himself?”

“Mallard isn’t exactly the man for this delicate business,” said Spence, smiling.

Miriam glanced from him to Eleanor. She would have said no more, had it been in her power to keep silence; but an involuntary persistence, the same in kind as that often manifested by questioning children—an impulsive feeling that the next query must elicit something which would satisfy a vague desire, obliged her to speak again.

“Is it his intention not to see Cecily at all?”

“I think very likely it is, Miriam,” answered Eleanor, when her husband showed that he left her to do so.

“I understand.”

To which remark Eleanor, when Miriam was gone, attached the interrogative, “I wonder whether she does?” The Spences did not feel it incumbent upon them to direct her in the matter; it were just as well if she followed a mistaken clue.

Two days later, Mrs. Lessingham and her niece, accompanied by Reuben Elgar, departed for Capri. The day after that, Mr. and Mrs. Bradshaw in very deed said good-bye to Naples and travelled northwards. They purposed spending Christmas in Rome, and thence by quicker stages they would return to the land of civilization. Spence went to the station to see them off, and at lunch, after speaking of this and other things, he said to Miriam:

“Mallard wishes to see you. I told him I thought five o'clock this afternoon would be a convenient time?”

Miriam assented, but not without betraying surprise and uneasiness. Subsequently she just mentioned to Eleanor that she would receive the visitor in her own sitting-room. There, as five o'clock drew near, she waited in painful agitation. What it was Mallard's purpose to say to her she could not with any degree of certainty conjecture. Had Reuben told him of the part she had played in connection with that eventful day at Pompeii? What would be his tone? Did he come to ask for particulars concerning her brother? Intend what he might, she dreaded the interview. And yet—fact of which she made no secret to herself—she had rather he came than not. When it was a few minutes past five, and no foot had yet sounded in the corridor, all other feeling was lost in the misgiving that he might have changed his mind. Perhaps he had decided to write instead, and her heart sank at the thought. She felt an overpowering curiosity as to the way in which this event had affected the strange man. Reports were

no satisfaction to her; she desired to see him and hear him speak.

The footsteps at last! She trembled, went hot and cold, had a parched throat. Mallard entered, and she did not offer him her hand; perhaps he might reject it. In consequence there was an absurdly formal bow on both sides.

“Please sit down, Mr. Mallard.”

She saw that he was looking at the “St. Cecilia,” but with what countenance her eyes could not determine. To her astonishment, he spoke of the picture, and in an unembarrassed tone.

“An odd thing that this should be in your room.”

“Yes. We spoke of it the first time Cecily came.”

Her accents were not firm. At once he fixed his gaze on her, and did not remove it until her temples throbbed and she cast down her eyes in helpless abashment.

“I have had a long letter from your brother, Mrs. Baske. It seems he posted

it just before they left for Capri. I can only reply to it in one way, and it gives me so much pain to do so that I am driven to ask your help. He writes begging me to take another view of this matter, and permit them to be married before very long. The letter is powerfully written; few men could plead their cause with such eloquence and force. But it cannot alter my determination. I must reply briefly and brutally. What I wish to ask you is, whether with sincerity you can urge my arguments upon your brother, and give me this assistance in the most obvious duty?"

"I have no influence with him, Mr. Mallard."

Again he looked at her persistently, and said with deliberation:

"I think you must have some. And this is one of the cases in which a number of voices may possibly prevail, though one or two are ineffectual. But—if you will forgive me my direct words—your voice is, of course, useless if you cannot speak in earnest."

She was able now to return his look, for her pride was being aroused. The face she examined bore such plain marks of suffering that with difficulty she removed her eyes from it. Nor could she make reply to him, so intensely were her thoughts occupied with what she saw.

"Perhaps," he said, "you had rather not undertake anything at once." Then, his voice changing slightly, "I have no wish to seem a suppliant, Mrs. Baske. My reasons for saying that this marriage shall not, if I can prevent it, take place till Miss Doran is of age, are surely simple and convincing enough; I can't suppose that it is necessary to insist upon them to you. But I feel I had no right to leave any means unused. By speaking to you, I might cause you to act more earnestly than you otherwise would. That was all."

"I am very willing to help you," she replied, with carefully courteous voice.

"After all, I had rather we didn't put it in that way," Mallard resumed, with a

curious doggedness, as if her tone were distasteful to him. "My own part in the business is accidental. Please tell me: is it, or not, your own belief that a delay is desirable?"

The reply was forced from her.

"I certainly think it is."

"May I ask you if you have reasoned with your brother about it?"

"I haven't had any communication with him since — since we knew of this." She paused; but, before Mallard had shown an intention to speak, added abruptly, "I should have thought that Miss Doran might have been trusted to understand and respect your wishes."

"Miss Doran knows my wishes," he answered drily, "but I haven't insisted upon them to her, and am not disposed to do so."

"Would it not be very simple and natural if you did?"

The look he gave her was stern all but to anger.

“It wouldn’t be a very pleasant task to me, Mrs. Baske, to lay before her my strongest arguments against her marrying Mr. Elgar. And if I don’t do that, it seems to me that it is better to let her know my wishes through Mrs. Lessingham. As you say, it is to be hoped she will understand and respect them.”

He rose from his chair. For some reason, Miriam could not utter the words that one part of her prompted. She wished to assure him that she would do her best with Reuben, but at the same time she resented his mode of addressing her, and the conflict made her tongue-tied.

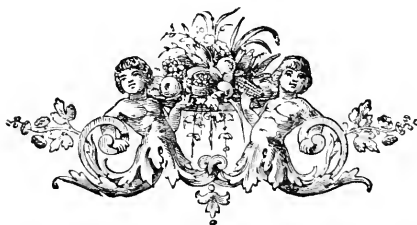
“I won’t occupy more of your time, Mrs. Baske.”

She would have begged him to resume his seat. The conversation had been so short; she wanted to hear him speak more freely. But her request, she knew, would be disregarded. With an effort, she succeeded in holding out her hand; Mallard held it lightly for an instant.

“I will write to him,” fell from her lips, when already he had turned to the door.

“If necessary, I will go and see him.”

“Thank you,” he replied with civility, and left her.





CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE WINGS OF THE MORNING.

“ I CANNOT answer your long letter ; to such correspondence there is no end. Come and spend a day here with us ; I promise to listen patiently, and you shall hear how things are beginning to shape themselves in my mind, now I have had leisure to reflect. Cecily sends a line. Do come. Take the early boat on Monday ; Spence will give you all particulars, and see you off at Santa Lucia. We really have some very sober plans, not unapproved by Mrs. Lessingham. Will meet you at the Marina.”

Miriam received this on Sunday morning, and went to her own room to read it. The few lines of Cecily’s writing which were enclosed, she glanced over with careless eye ; yet not with mere carelessness, either,

but as if something of aversion disinclined her to peruse them attentively. That sheet she at once laid aside; Reuben's note she still held in her hand, and kept re-reading it.

She went to the window and looked over towards Capri. A slight mist softened its outlines this morning; it seemed very far away, on the dim borders of sea and sky. For a long time now she had felt the luring charm of that island, always before her eyes, yet never more than a blue mountainous shape. Lately she had been reading of it, and her fancy, new to such picturings, was possessed by the mysterious dread of its history in old time, the terror of its cliffs, the loveliness of its green hollows, and the wonder of its sea-caves. Her childhood had known nothing of fairy-land, and now, in this tardy awakening of the imaginative part of her nature, she thought sometimes of Capri much as a child is wont to think of the enchanted countries, nameless, regionless, in books of fable.

What thoughts for Sunday ! But Miriam was far on the way of those who recognize themselves as overmastered by temptation, and grow almost reckless in the sins they cannot resist. So long it was since she had been able to attend the accustomed public worship, and now its substitute in the privacy of her room had become irksome. She blushed to be practising hypocrisy ; the Spences were careful to refrain from interfering with her to-day, and here, withdrawn from their sight, she passed the hours in wearisome idleness—in worse than that.

She could not look again at Cecily's letter. More ; she could not let her eyes turn to Raphael's picture. But before the mirrors she paused often and long, losing herself in self-regard.

Early on the morrow, she drove down with Spence to the Santa Lucia, and went on board the Capri boat. There were few passengers, a handful of Germans and

an English family—father, mother, two daughters, and two sons. Sitting apart, Miriam cast many glances at her country-people, and not without envy. They were comely folk, in the best English health, refined in bearing, full of enjoyment. Now and then a few words of their talk fell upon her ears, and it was merry, kindly, intimate talk, the fruit of a lifetime of domestic happiness. It made her think again of what her own home-life had been. Such companionship of parents and children was inconceivable in her experience. The girls observed her, and, she believed, spoke of her. Must she not look strange in their eyes? Probably they felt sorry for her, as an invalid whose countenance was darkened by recent pain.

The boat made across for Sorrento first of all, where a few more persons came on board. Miriam was by this time enjoying the view of the coast. From this point she kept her gaze fixed on Capri. One more delay on the voyage; the steamer stopped

near the Blue Grotto, that such of the passengers as wished might visit it before landing. Miriam kept her place, and for the present was content to watch the little boats, as they rocked for a few moments at the foot of the huge cliff and then suddenly disappeared through the entrance to the cavern. When the English family returned, she listened to their eager, wondering conversation. A few minutes more, and she was landing at the Marina, where Reuben awaited her.

He had a carriage ready for the drive up the serpent road to the hotel where Mrs. Lessingham and her niece were staying. His own quarters were elsewhere—at the Pagano, dear to artists.

“Well, have you enjoyed the voyage? What did you think of Sorrento? We watched the steamer across from there; we were up on the road to Anacapri, yonder. You don’t look so well as when I saw you last—nothing like.”

He waited for no reply to his questions,

and talked with nervous brokenness. Seated in the carriage, he could not keep still from one moment to the next. His eyes had the unquiet of long-continued agitation, the look that results from intense excitement when it has become the habit of day after day.

“Mallard has been talking to you,” he said suddenly.

“Why do you say that?”

“I know he has, from your letter.—Look at the views!”

“What plans did you speak of?”

“Oh, we’ll talk about it afterwards. But Mallard *has* been talking you over?”

Miriam had no resolve by which to guide herself. She knew not distinctly why she had come to Capri. Her familiar self-reliance and cold disregard of anything but a few plain rules in regulating her conduct, were things of the past. She felt herself idly swayed by conflicting influences, unable even to debate what course she should take; the one emotion of which she was

clearly conscious was of so strange and disturbing a kind that, so far from impelling her to act, it seemed merely to destroy all her customary motives and leave her subject to the will of others. It was the return of weakness such as had possessed her mind when she lay ill, when she was ceaselessly troubled with a desire for she knew not what, and, unable to utter it, had no choice but to admit the suggestions and biddings of those who cared for her. She could not even resent this language of Reuben's, to which formerly she would have opposed her unyielding pride ; his proximity infected her with nervousness, but at the same time made her flaccid before his energy.

“ He came and spoke to me about you,” she admitted. “ But he left me to do as I saw fit.”

“ After putting the case against me as strongly as it could be put. I know ; you needn't tell me anything about the conversation. Let us leave it till afterwards.—You see how this road winds, so that the incline

may be gentle enough for carriages. There are stony little paths, just like the beds of mountain streams, going straight down to the Marina. I lost myself again and again yesterday among the gardens and vineyards. Look back over the bay to Naples ! ”

But in a minute or two the other subject was resumed, again with a suddenness that told of inability to keep from speaking his thoughts.

“ You understand, I dare say, why Mallard is making such a fuss ? ”

“ How could I help understanding ? ”

“ But *do* you understand ? ”

“ What do you mean ? ” she asked irritably.

“ Does he speak like a man who is disinterested ? ”

“ It is not my business to discuss Mr. Mallard’s motives.”

“ It certainly is mine—and yours too, if you care anything for me.”

They reached the hotel without further

debate of this subject. It was not much after one o'clock ; all lunched together in private, talking only of Capri. Later they walked to the villa of Tiberius. Elgar kept up an appearance of light-hearted enjoyment ; Cecily was less able to disguise her preoccupation. Mrs. Lessingham seemed to have accepted the inevitable. Her first annoyance having passed, she was submitting to that personal charm in Elgar which all women sooner or later confessed ; her behaviour to him was indulgent, and marked only with a very gentle reserve when he talked too much paradox.

Elgar went to his hotel for dinner, and left the others to themselves through the evening. The next day was given to wandering about the island. On the return at sunset, Miriam and Reuben had a long talk together, in which it was made manifest that the "plans" were just as vague as ever. Reuben had revived the mention of literary work, that was all, and proposed to make his head-quarters in Paris, in order

that he might not be too far from Cecily, who would, it was presumed, remain on the Continent. This evening he dined with the ladies. Afterwards Cecily played. When Miriam and Mrs. Lessingham chanced to be conversing together, Elgar stepped up to the piano, and murmured :

“Will you come out into the garden for a few minutes ? There’s a full moon ; it’s magnificent.”

Cecily let her fingers idle upon the keys, then rose and went to where her aunt was sitting. There was an exchange of words in a low tone, and she left the room. Elgar at once approached Mrs. Lessingham to take leave of her.

“The Grotta Azzurra to-morrow,” he said gaily. “Perhaps you won’t care to go again ? My grave sister will make a very proper chaperon.”

“Let us discuss that when to-morrow comes. Please to limit your moon-gazing to five minutes.”

“At the utmost.”

From the hotel garden opened a clear prospect towards Naples, which lay as a long track of lights beyond the expanse of deep blue. The coast was distinctly outlined ; at intervals glowed against the far sky the fire of Vesuvius. Above the trees of the garden shone white crags, unsubstantial, unearthly in the divine moonlight. There was no sound, yet to intense listening the air became full of sea-music. It was the night of Homer, the island-charm of the Odyssey.

“Answer me quickly, Cecily ; we have only a few minutes, and I want to say a great deal. You have talked with Miriam?”

“Yes.”

“You know that she repeats what Mallard has instructed her to say ? Their one object now is to get me at a distance from you. You see how your aunt has changed—in appearance ; her policy is to make me think that she will be my friend when I am away. I can speak with certainty after observing her for so long ;

in reality she is as firm against me as ever. Don't you notice, too, something strange in Miriam's behaviour?"

"She is not like herself."

"As unlike as could be. Mallard has influenced her strongly. Who knows what he told her?"

"Of you?"

"Perhaps of himself."

"Dear, he could not speak to her in that way!"

"A man in love—and in love with Cecily Doran—can do anything. The Spences are his close friends; they too have been working on Miriam."

"But why, why do you return to this? We have spoken of the worst they can do. To fear anything from their persuasions is to distrust me."

"Cecily, I don't distrust you, but I can't live away from you. I might have gone straight from Naples, but I can't go now; every hour with you has helped to make it impossible. In talking to your aunt and

to Miriam, I have been consciously false. Come further this way, into the shadow. Who is over there?"

"Some one we don't know."

Her voice had sunk to a whisper. Elgar led her by the hand into a further recess of the garden; the hand was almost crushed between his own as he continued.

"You must come with me, Cecily. We will go away together, and be married at once."

She panted rather than breathed.

"You must! I can't leave you! I had rather throw myself from these Capri rocks than go away with more than two years of solitude before me."

Cecily made no answer.

"If you think, you will see this is best in every way. It will be kindest to poor Mallard, putting an end at once to any hopes he may have."

"We can't be married without his consent," Cecily whispered.

"Oh yes; I can manage that. I have

already thought of everything. Be up early to-morrow morning, and leave the hotel at half-past seven, as if you were going for a walk. Neither your aunt nor Miriam will be stirring by then. Go down the road as far as beyond the next turning, and I will be there with a carriage. At the Marina I will have a boat ready to take us over to Sorrento; we will drive to Castellammare, and there take train direct for Caserta and onwards, so missing Naples altogether. You shall travel as my sister. We will go to London, and be married there. Of course you can't bring luggage, but what does that matter? We can stop anywhere and buy what things you need. I have quite enough money for the present."

"But think of the shock to them all!" she pleaded, trembling through her frame. "How ill I should seem to repay their long kindness! I can't do this, my dearest; oh, I can't do this! I will see Mr. Mallard, as I wished——"

"You shall not see him!" he interrupted

violently. "I couldn't bear it. How do I know——"

"How cruel to speak like that to me!"

"Of your own cruelty you never think. You have made me mad with love of you, and have no right to refuse to marry me when I show you the way. If I didn't love you so much, I could bear well enough to let you speak with any one. Your love is very different to mine, or you couldn't hesitate a moment."

"Let me think! I can't answer you to-night."

"To-night, or never!—Oh yes, I understand well enough all your reasons for hesitating. It would mean relinquishing the wedding-dress and the carriages and all the rest of the show that delights women. You are afraid of Mrs. Grundy crying shame when it is known that you have travelled across Europe with me. You feel it will be difficult to resume your friendships afterwards. I grant all these things, but I didn't think they would have meant so much to Cecily."

“You know well that none of these reasons have any weight with me. It is only in joking that you can speak of them. But the unkindness to them all, dear! Think of it!”

“Why say ‘to them all’? Wouldn’t it be simpler to say ‘the unkindness to Mallard’?”

She looked up into his face.

“Why does love make a man speak so bitterly and untruthfully? Nothing could make me do *you* such a wrong.”

“Because you are so pure of heart and mind that nothing but truth can be upon your lips. If I were not very near madness, I could never speak so to you. My own dear love, think only of what I suffer day after day! And what folly is it that would keep us apart! Suppose they had none but conscientious motives; in that case, these people take upon themselves to say what is good for us, what we may be allowed and what not; they treat us as children. Of course, it is all for *your* protection. I am

not fit to be your husband, my beautiful girl! Tell me—who knows me better, Mallard or yourself?”

“No one knows you as I do, dearest, nor ever will.”

“And do you think me too vile a creature to call you my wife?”

“I need not answer that. You are as much nobler than I am as your strength is greater than mine.”

“But they would remind you that you are an heiress. I have not made so good a use of my own money as I might have done, and the likelihood is that I shall squander yours, bring you to beggary. Do you believe that?”

“I know it is not true.”

“Then what else can they oppose to our wish? Here are all the objections, and all seem to be worthless. Yet there might be one more. You are very young—how I rejoice in knowing it, sweet flower!—perhaps your love of me is a mere illusion. It ought to be tested by time; very likely it

may die away, and give place to something truer."

"If so, let me die myself sooner than survive such happiness!"

"Why, then what have they to say for themselves? Their opposition is mistake, stubborn error. And are we to sacrifice two whole years, the best time of our lives, to such obstinacy? Either of us may die, Cecily. Suppose it to be my lot, what would be your thoughts then?"

His head bent to hers, and their faces touched.

"Dare you risk that, my love?"

"I dare not."

Her answer trembled upon his hearing as though it came upon the night air from the sea.

"You will come with me to-morrow?"

"I will."

He sought her offered lips, and for a few instants their whispering in the shadow ceased. Then he repeated rapidly the directions he had already given her.

“Put on your warmest cloak ; it will be cold on the water. Now I can say good-night. Kiss me once more, and once more promise.”

She pressed her arms about him.

“I am giving you my life. If I had more, I would give it. Be faithful to me !”

“Then, you do doubt me ?”

“Never ! But say it to-night, to give me strength.”

“I will be faithful to you whilst I have life.”

She issued from shadows into broad moonlight, looked once round, once at the gleaming crags, and passed again into gloom.

“I think it very unlikely,” Mrs. Lessingham was saying to Miriam, in her pleasantest voice of confidence, “that Mr. Mallard will insist on the whole term.”

“No doubt that will much depend on the next year,” Miriam replied, trying to seem impartial.

“No doubt whatever. I am glad we came here. They are both much quieter and more sensible. In a few days I think your brother will have made up his mind.”

“I hope so.”

“Cecily lost her head a little at first, but I see that her influence is now in the sober direction, as one would have anticipated. When Mr. Elgar has left us, no doubt Mr. Mallard will come over, and we shall have quiet talk. What an odd man he is ! How distinctly I could have foreseen his action in these circumstances ! And I know just how it will be, as soon as things have got into a regular course again. Mr. Mallard hates disturbance and agitation. Of course he has avoided seeing Cecily as yet ; imagine his exasperated face if he became involved in a ‘ scene ’ ! ”

And Mrs. Lessingham laughed urbanely.

A short and troubled sleep at night’s heaviest ; then long waiting for the first glimmer of dawn. How unreal the world

seemed to her! She tried to link this present morning with the former days, but her life had lost its continuity; the past was past in a sense she had never known; and as for the future, it was like gazing into darkness that throbbed and flashed. It meant nothing to her to say that this was Capri—that the blue waves and the wind of morning would presently bear her to Sorrento; the familiar had no longer a significance; her consciousness was but a point in space and eternity. She had no regret of her undertaking, no fear of what lay before her, but a profound sadness, as though the burden of all mortal sorrows were laid upon her soul.

At seven o'clock she was ready. A very few things that could be easily carried she would take with her; her cloak would hide them. Now she must wait for the appointed moment. It seemed to be very cold; she shivered.

A minute or two before the half-hour, she left her room silently. On the stairs a

servant passed her, and looked surprised in giving the "Buon giorno." She walked quickly through the garden, and was on the firm road. At the place indicated stood Elgar beside the carriage, and without exchanging a word they took their seats.

At the Marina, they had but to step from the carriage to the boat. Elgar's luggage was thrown on board, and the men pushed off from the quay.

Bitterly cold, but what a glorious sunrise ! Against the flushed sky, those limestone heights of Capri caught the golden radiance and shone wondrously. The green water, gently swelling but unbroken, was like some rarer element, too limpid for this world's shores. With laughter and merry talk between themselves, the boatmen hoisted their sail.

And the gods sent a fair breeze from the west, and it smote upon the sail, and the prow cleft its track of foam, and on they sped over the back of the barren sea.



CHAPTER XV.

“WOLF !”

It was the case of between two stools, and Clifford Marsh did not like the bump. From that dinner with Elgar he came home hilariously dismayed ; when his hilarity had evaporated with the wine that was its cause, dismay possessed him wholly. Miss Doran was not for him, and in the mean time he had offended Madeline beyond forgiveness. With what countenance could he now turn to her again ? Her mother would welcome his surrender—and it was drawing on towards the day when submission even to his step-father could no longer be postponed—but he suspected that Madeline’s resolve to have done with him was strengthened by resentment of her mother’s importunities. To be sure, it was

some sort of consolation to know that, if indeed he went his way for good, bitterness and regrets would be the result to the Denyer family, who had no great faculty in making alliances of this kind ; in a few years' time, Madeline would be wishing that she had not let her pride interfere with a chance of marriage. But, on the other hand, there was the awkward certainty that he too would lament making a fool of himself. He by no means liked the thought of relinquishing Madeline ; he had not done so, even when heating his brain with contemplation of Cecily Doran. In what manner could he bring about between her and himself a drama which might result in tears and mutual pardon ?

But whilst he pondered this, fate was at work on his behalf. On the day which saw the departure of the Bradshaws, there landed at Naples, from Alexandria, a certain lean, wiry man, with shoulders that stooped slightly, with grizzled head and parchment visage ; a man who glanced

about him in a keen, anxious way, and had other nervous habits. Having passed the custom-house, he hired a porter to take his luggage—two leather bags and a heavy chest, all much the worse for wear—to that same hotel at which Mallard was just now staying. There he refreshed himself, and, it being early in the afternoon, went forth again, as if on business; for decidedly he was no tourist. When he had occasion to speak, his Italian was fluent and to the point; he conducted himself as one to whom travel and intercourse with every variety of men were life-long habits.

His business conducted him to the Mergellina, to the house of Madame Glück, where he inquired for Mrs. Denyer. He was led upstairs, and into the room where sat Mrs. Denyer and her daughters. The sight of him caused commotion. Barbara, Madeline, and Zillah pressed around him, with cries of “Papa!” Their mother rose and looked at him with concern.

When the greetings were over, Mr. Denyer seated himself and wiped his forehead with a silk handkerchief. He was ominously grave. His eyes avoided the faces before him, as if in shame. He looked at his boots, which had just been blacked, but were shabby, and then glanced at the elegant skirts of his wife and daughters; he looked at his shirt-cuffs, which were clean but frayed, and then gathered courage to lift his eyes as far as the dainty hands folded upon laps in show of patience.

“Madeline,” he began, in a voice which was naturally harsh, but could express much tenderness, as now, “what news of Clifford?”

“He’s still here, papa,” was the answer, in a very low voice.

“I’m glad of that. Girls, I’ve got something to tell you. I wish it was something pleasant.”

His parchment cheek showed a distinct flush. The attempt to keep his eyes on the girls was a failure; he seemed to be about to confess a crime.

“ I’ve brought you bad news, the worst I ever brought you yet. My dears, I can hold out no longer ; I’m at the end of my means. If I could have kept this from you, Heaven knows I would have done, but it is better to tell you all plainly.”

Mrs. Denyer’s brows were knitted ; her lips were compressed in angry obstinacy ; she would not look up from the floor. The girls glanced at her, then at one another. Barbara tried to put on a sceptical expression, but failed ; Madeline was sunk in trouble ; Zillah showed signs of tearfulness.

“ I can only hope,” Mr. Denyer continued, “ that you don’t owe very much here. I thought, after my last letter ”—he seemed more abashed than ever—“ you might have looked round for something a little——” He glanced at the ornaments of the room, but at the same time chanced to catch his wife’s eye, and did not finish the sentence. “ But never mind that ; time enough now that the necessity has come.

You know me well enough, Barbara, and you, Maddy, and you, Zillah, my child, to be sure that I wouldn't deny you anything it was in my power to give. But fortune's gone against me this long time. I shall have to make a new start, new efforts. I'm going out to Vera Cruz again.”

He once more wiped his forehead, and took the opportunity to look askance at Mrs. Denyer, dubiously, half reproachfully.

“And what are *we* to do?” asked his wife, with resentful helplessness.

“I am afraid you must go to England,” Mr. Denyer replied apologetically, turning his look to the girls again. “After settling here, and paying the expenses of the journey, I shall have a little left, very little indeed. But I'm going to Vera Cruz on a distinct engagement, and I shall soon be able to send you something. I'm afraid you had better go to Aunt Dora's again; I've heard from her lately, and she has the usual spare rooms.”

The girls exchanged looks of dismay.

The terrible silence was broken by Zillah, who spoke in quavering accents.

"Papa dear, I have made up my mind to get a place as a nursery governess. I shall very soon be able to do so."

"And I shall do the same, papa—or something of the kind," came abruptly from Madeline.

"You, Maddy?" exclaimed her father, who had received the youngest girl's announcement with a look of sorrowful resignation, but was shocked at the other's words.

"I am no longer engaged to Mr. Marsh," Madeline proceeded, casting down her eyes. "Please don't say anything, mamma. I have made up my mind. I shall look for employment."

Her father shook his head in distress. He had never enjoyed the control or direction of his daughters, and his long absences during late years had put him almost on terms of ceremony with them. In time gone by, their mother had been to him an

object of veneration ; it was his privilege to toil that she might live in luxury ; but his illusions regarding her had received painful shocks, and it was to the girls that he now sacrificed himself. Their intellect, their attainments, at once filled him with pride and made him humble in their presence. But for his reluctance to impose restraints upon their mode of life, he might have avoided this present catastrophe ; he had cried “Wolf!” indeed, in his mild way, but took no energetic measures when he found his cry disregarded—all the worse for him now that he could postpone the evil day no longer.

“You are the best judge of your own affairs, Madeline,” he replied despondently. “I’m very sorry, my girl.”

“All I can say is,” exclaimed Mrs. Denyer, as if with dignified reticence, “that I think we should have had longer warning of this !”

“My dear, I have warned you repeatedly, for nearly a year.”

"I mean *serious* warning. Who was to imagine that things would come to such a pass as this?"

"You never told us there was danger of absolute beggary, papa," remarked Barbara, in a tone not unlike her mother's.

"I ought to have spoken more plainly," was her father's meek answer. "You are quite right, Barbara. I feel that I am to blame."

"I don't think you are at all," said Madeline, with decision. "Your letters were plain enough, if we had chosen to pay any attention to them."

Her father looked up apprehensively, deprecating defence of himself at the cost of family discord. But he was powerless to prevent the gathering storm. Mrs. Denyer gazed sternly at her recalcitrant daughter, and at length discharged upon the girl's head all the wrath with which this situation inspired her. Barbara took her mother's side. Zillah wept and sobbed words of reconciliation. The unhappy cause of the

tumult took refuge at the window, sunk in gloom.

However, there was no doubt about it this time ; trunks must be packed, bills must be paid, indignities must be swallowed. The Aunt Dora of whom Mr. Denyer had spoken was his own sister, the wife of a hotel-keeper at Southampton. Some seven years ago, in a crisis of the Denyers' fate, she had hospitably housed them for several months, and was now willing to do as much again, notwithstanding the arrogance with which Mrs. Denyer had repaid her. To the girls it had formerly mattered little where they lived ; at their present age, it was far otherwise. The hotel was of a very modest description ; society would become out of the question in such a retreat. Madeline and Zillah might choose, as the less of two evils, the lot for which they declared themselves ready ; but Barbara had no notion of turning governess. She shortly went to her bedroom, and spent a very black hour indeed.

They were to start to-morrow morning. With rage Barbara saw the interdiction of hopes which were just becoming serious. Another month of those after-dinner colloquies in the drawing-room, and who could say what point of intimacy Mr. Musselwhite might have reached. He was growing noticeably more articulate ; he was less absent-minded. Oh, for a month more !

This evening she took her usual place, and at length had the tormenting gratification of seeing Mr. Musselwhite approach in the usual way. Though sitting next to him at dinner, she had said nothing of what would happen on the morrow ; the present was a better opportunity.

“ You have no book this evening, Miss Denyer ? ”

“ No.”

“ No headache, I hope ? ”

“ Yes, I have a little headache.”

He looked at her with gentlemanly sympathy.

“ I have had to see to a lot of things in a

hurry. Unexpectedly, we have to leave Naples to-morrow; we are going to England.”

“Indeed? You don’t say so! Really, I’m very sorry to hear that, Miss Denyer.”

“I am sorry too—to have to leave Italy for such a climate at this time of the year.” She shuddered. “But my father has just arrived from Alexandria, and—for family reasons—wishes us to travel on with him.”

Mr. Musselwhite seemed to reflect anxiously. He curled his moustaches, he plucked his whiskers, he looked about the room with wide eyes.

“How lonely it will be at the dinner-table!” he said at length. “So many have gone of late. But I hoped there was no danger of your going, Miss Denyer.”

“We had no idea of it ourselves till to-day.”

A long silence, during which Mr. Musselwhite’s reflections grew intense.

“You are going to London?” he asked mechanically.

“Not at first. I hardly know. I think we shall be for some time with friends at Southampton.”

“Indeed? How odd! I also have friends at Southampton. A son of Sir Edward Mull; he married a niece of mine.”

Barbara could have cried with mortification. She muttered she knew not what. Then again came a blank in the dialogue.

“I trust we may meet again,” was Mr. Musselwhite’s next sentence. It cost him an effort; he reddened a little, and moved his feet about.

“There is no foreseeing. I—we—I am sorry to say my father has brought us rather unpleasant news.”

She knew not whether it was a stroke of policy, or grossly imprudent, to make this confession. But it came to her lips, and she uttered it half in recklessness. It affected Mr. Musselwhite strangely. His countenance fell, and a twinge seemed to catch one of his legs; at the same time it made him fluent.

“I grieve to hear that, Miss Denyer; I grieve indeed. Your departure would have been bad enough, but I really grieve to think you should have cause of distress.”

“Thank you for your sympathy, Mr. Musselwhite.”

“But perhaps we may meet again in England, for all that? Will you permit me to give you my London address—a—a little club that I belong to, and where my friends often send letters? I mean that I should be so very glad if it were ever possible for me to serve you in any trifle. As you know, I don’t keep any—any establishment in England at present; but possibly—as you say, there is no anticipating the future. I should be very happy indeed if we chanced to meet, there or abroad.”

“You are very kind, Mr. Musselwhite.”

“If I might ask you for your own probable address?”

“It is so uncertain. But I am sure mamma would have pleasure in sending it, when we are settled.”

“Thank you so very much.” He looked up after long meditation. “I really do *not* know what I shall do when you are gone, Miss Denyer.”

And then, without warning, he said good night and walked away. Barbara, who had thought that the conversation was just about to become interesting, felt her heart sink into unfathomable depths. She went back to her bedroom and cried wretchedly for a long time.

In consequence of private talk with his wife, when the family conclave had broken up, Mr. Denyer went in search of Clifford Marsh. They had met only once hitherto, six months ago, when Mr. Denyer paid a flying visit to London, and had just time to make the acquaintance of his prospective son-in-law. This afternoon they walked together for an hour about the Chiaia, with the result that an understanding of some kind seemed to be arrived at between them.

Mr. Denyer returned to the *pension*, and, when dinner-time approached, surprised Madeline with the proposal that she should come out and dine with him at a restaurant.

“The fact is,” he whispered to her, with a laugh, “my appearance is not quite up to the standard of your dinner-table. I’m rather too careless about these things; it’s doubtful whether I possess a decent suit. Let us go and find a quiet corner somewhere—if a fashionable young lady will do me so much honour.”

Through Madeline’s mind there passed a suspicion, but a restaurant-dinner hit her taste, and she accepted the invitation readily. Before long, they drove into the town. Perhaps in recognition of her having taken his part against idle reproaches, her father began, as soon as they were alone, to talk in a grave, earnest way about his affairs; and Madeline, who liked above all things to be respectfully treated, entered into the subject with dutiful consideration. He showed her exactly how his misfortunes had

accumulated, how this and that project had been a failure, what unadvised steps he had taken in fear of impending calamity. Snugly seated at the little marble table, they grew very confidential indeed. Mr. Denyer avowed his hope—the hope ever-retreating, though sometimes it had seemed within reach—of being able some day to find rest for the sole of his foot, to settle down with his family and enjoy a quiet close of life. Possibly this undertaking at Vera Cruz would be his last exile ; he explained it in detail, and dwelt on its promising aspects. Madeline felt compassionate and remorseful.

Of her own intimate concerns no word was said, but it happened strangely enough, just as they had finished dinner, that Clifford Marsh came strolling into the restaurant. He saw them, and with expressions of surprise explained that he had just turned in for a cup of coffee. Mr. Denyer invited him to sit down with them, and they had coffee together. Clifford kept

up a flow of characteristic talk, never directly addressing Madeline, nor encountering her look. He referred casually to his meeting with Mr. Denyer that afternoon.

“I shall be going back myself very shortly. It is probable that there will be something of a change in my circumstances; I may decide to give up a few hours each day to commercial pursuits. It all depends on—on uncertain things.”

“You won’t come out with me to Vera Cruz?” said Mr. Denyer, jocosely.

“No; I am a man of the old world. I must live in the atmosphere of art, or I don’t care to live at all.”

Madeline’s slight suspicion was confirmed. When they were about to leave the restaurant, Mr. Denyer said that he must go to the railway-station, to make a few inquiries. There was no use in Madeline’s going such a distance; would Clifford be so good as to see her safely home? Madeline made a few objections—she would really prefer to accompany her father; she would

not trouble Mr. Marsh—but in the end she found herself seated by Clifford in the carriage, passing rapidly through the streets.

Now was Clifford's opportunity ; he had prepared for it.

“ Madeline—you must let me call you by that name again, even if it is for the last time—I have heard what has happened.”

“ Happily, it does not affect you, Mr. Marsh.”

“ Indeed it does. It affects me so far, that it alters the whole course of my life. In spite of everything that has seemed to come between us, I have never allowed myself to think of our engagement as at an end. The parcel you sent me the other day is unopened ; if you do not open it yourself, no one ever shall. Whatever *you* may do, I cannot break faith. You ought to know me better than to misinterpret a few foolish and hasty words, and appearances that had a meaning you should have understood. The time has come now for putting an end to those misconceptions.”

“They no longer concern me. Please to speak of something else.”

“You must, at all events, understand my position before we part. This morning I was as firmly resolved as ever to risk everything, to renounce the aid of my relatives if it must be, and face poverty for the sake of art. Now all is changed. I shall accept my step-father’s offer, and all its results; becoming, if it can’t be helped, a mere man of business. I do this because of my sacred duties to *you*. As an artist, there’s no telling how long it might be before I could ask you again to be my wife; as a man of business, I may soon be in a position to do so. Don’t interrupt me, I entreat! It is no matter to me if you repulse me now, in your anger. I consider the engagement as still existing between us, and, such being the case, it is plainly my duty to take such steps as will enable me to offer you a home. By remaining an artist, I should satisfy one part of my conscience, but at the expense of all my better feelings; it might even be

supposed—though, I trust, not by you—that I made my helplessness an excuse for forgetting you when most you needed kindness. I shall go back to England, and devote myself with energy to the new task, however repulsive it may prove. Whether you think of me or not, I do it for your sake ; you cannot rob me of that satisfaction. Some day I shall again stand before you, and ask you for what you once promised. If then you refuse—well, I must bear the loss of all my hopes.”

“ You may direct your life as you choose,” Madeline replied scornfully, “ but you will please to understand that I give you no encouragement to hope anything from me. I almost believe you capable of saying, some day, that you took this step because I urged you to it. I have no interest whatever in your future ; our paths are separate. Let this be the end of it.”

But it was very far from the end of it. When the carriage stopped at Madame Glück's, mutual reproaches were at their height.

“You shall not leave me yet, Madeline,” said Clifford, as he alighted. “Come to the other side of the road, and let us walk along for a few minutes. You shall not go in, if I have to hold you by force.”

Madeline yielded, and in the light of the moon they walked side by side, continuing their dialogue.

“You are heartless! You have played with me from the first.”

“If so, I only treated you as you thought to treat me.”

“That you can attribute such baseness to me proves how incapable you are of distinguishing between truth and falsehood. How wretchedly I have been deceived in you!”

From upbraiding, he fell to lamentation. His life was wrecked; he had lost his ideals; and all through her unworthiness. Then, as Madeline was still unrelenting, he began to humble himself. He confessed his levity; he had not considered the risk he ran of losing her respect; all he had done was in

pique at her treatment of him. And in the end he implored her forgiveness, besought her to restore him to life by accepting his unqualified submission. To part from her on such terms as these meant despair; the consequences would be tragic. And when he could go no further in amorous supplication, when she felt that her injured pride had exacted the uttermost from his penitence, Madeline at length relented.

"Still," she said, after his outburst of gratitude, "don't think that I ask you to become a man of business. You shall never charge me with that. It is your nature to reproach other people when anything goes wrong with you; I know you only too well. You must decide for yourself; I will take no responsibility."

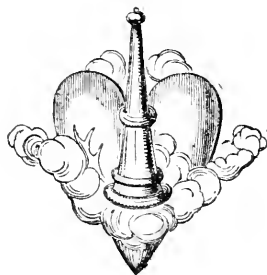
Yes, he accepted that; it was purely his own choice. Rather than lose her, he would toil at any most ignoble pursuit, amply repaid by the hope she granted him.

They had walked some distance, and were out of sight of the Mergellina, on the ascend-

ing road of Posilippo, all the moonlit glory of the bay before them.

“It will be long before we see it again,” said Madeline, sadly.

“We will spend our honeymoon here,” was Clifford’s hopeful reply.





CHAPTER XVI.

LETTERS.

ON the thirteenth day after the flight from Capri, Edward Spence, leaving the villa for his afternoon walk, encountered the postman and received from him three letters. One was addressed to Ross Mallard, Esq., care of Edward Spence, Esq.; another, to Mrs. Spence; the third, to Mrs. Baske. As he reascended the stairs, somewhat more quickly than his wont, Spence gave narrow attention to the handwriting on the envelopes. He found Eleanor where he had left her a few minutes before, at the piano, busy with a difficult passage of Brahms. She looked round in surprise, and on seeing the letters started up eagerly.

“Do you know Elgar’s hand?” Spence asked. “These two from London are his,

I should imagine. This for you is from Mrs. Lessingham, isn't it ?”

“Yes ; I think this is the news, at last,” said Eleanor, inspecting Mrs. Baske's letter, not without feminine emotion. “I'll take it to her. Shall you go over with the other ?”

“He'll be here after dinner ; the likelihood is that I shouldn't find him.”

“Occasionally—very occasionally—you lack tact, my husband. He would hardly care to open this and read it in our presence.”

“More than occasionally, my dear girl, you remind me of the woman whose price is above rubies. I'll go over and leave it for him at once. Just to show the male superiority, however, I shall be careful to make my walk a few minutes longer than usual—a thing of which you would be quite incapable whilst the contents of Miriam's letter were unknown to you.”

Alone again, Eleanor sent the letter to Miriam's room by a servant, and with uncertain fingers broke the envelope of that addressed to herself. Already she had

heard once from Mrs. Lessingham, who ten days ago left Naples to join certain friends in Rome; the first hurried glance over the present missive showed that it contained no intelligence. She had scarcely begun to read it attentively, when the door opened and Miriam came in.

Her face was pale with agitation, and her eyes had the strangest light in them; to one who knew nothing of the circumstances, she would have appeared exultant. Eleanor could not but gaze at her intently.

“From Reuben?”

“Yes.” Miriam suppressed her voice, and held out the sheet of note-paper, which fluttered. “Read it.”

The body of the letter was as follows:—

“I hope we have caused you no anxiety; from the first moment when our departure was known, you must have understood that we had resolved to put an end to useless delay. We travelled to London as brother and sister, and to-day have become man and wife. The above will be our address

for a short time ; we have not yet decided where we shall ultimately live.

“By this same post I write to Mallard, addressed to him at the villa. I hope he has had the good sense to wait quietly for news.

“Cecily sends her love to you—though she half fears that you will reject it. I cannot see why you should. We have done the only sensible thing, and of course in a month or two it will be just the same, to everybody concerned, as if we had been married in the most foolish way that respectability can contrive. Let us hear from you very soon, dear sister. We talk much of you, and hope to have many a bright day with you yet—more genuinely happy than that we spent in tracking out old Tiberius.”

Eleanor looked up, and again was struck with the singular light in her cousin's eyes.

“Well, it only tells us what we anticipated. Of course he made false declarations. If Mr. Mallard were really as grim as he

sometimes looks, the result to both of them might be unpleasant."

"But the marriage could not be undone?" Miriam asked quickly.

"Oh no. Scarcely desirable that it should be."

Miriam took the letter, and in a few minutes went back again to her room.

At nine o'clock in the evening, the Spences, who sat alone, received the foreseen visit from Mallard. They welcomed him silently. As he sat down, he had a smile on his face; he drew a letter deliberately from his pocket, and, without preface, began to read it aloud, still in a deliberate manner.

"Let me first of all make a formal announcement. We have this morning been married by registrar's licence. We intend to live for a few weeks at this present address, where we have taken some furnished rooms until better arrangements can be made. I lose no time in writing to you, for of course there is business between

us that you will desire to transact as soon as may be.

“In obtaining the licence, I naturally gave false information regarding Cecily’s age; this was an inevitable consequence of the step we had taken. You know my opinions on laws and customs: for the multitude they are necessary, and an infraction of them by the average man is, logically enough, called a sin against society; for Cecily and myself, in relation to such a matter as our becoming man and wife, the law is idle form. Personally, I could have wished to dispense with the absurdity altogether, but, as things are, this involves an injustice to a woman. I told my falsehoods placidly, for they were meaningless in my eyes. I have the satisfaction of knowing that you cannot, without inconsistency, find fault with me.

“And now I speak as one who would gladly be on terms of kindness with you. You know me, Mallard; you must be aware how impossible it was for me to wait

two years. As for Cecily, her one word, again and again repeated on the journey, was, 'How unkind I shall seem to them !' and I know that it was the seeming disrespect to you which most of all distressed her. For her sake, I make it my petition that you will let the past be past. She cannot yet write to you, but is sad in the thought of having incurred your displeasure. Whatever you say to me, let it be said privately ; do not hurt Cecily. I mentioned 'business ;' the word and the thing are equally hateful to me. I most sincerely wish Cecily had nothing, that the vile question of money might never arise. Herein, at all events, you will do me justice ; I am no fortune-hunter.

"If you come to London, send a line and appoint a place of meeting. But could not everything be done through lawyers ? You must judge ; but, again I ask it, do not give Cecily more pain."

The listeners were smiling gravely. After a silence, the letter was discussed, especially

its second paragraph. Mallard was informed of the note which Miriam had received.

“I shall go to-morrow,” he said, “and ‘transact my business.’ On the whole, it might as well be done through lawyers, but I had better be in London.”

“And then ?” asked Eleanor.

“I shall perhaps go and spend a week with the people at Sowerby Bridge. But you shall hear from me.”

“Will you speak to Mrs. Baske ?”

“I don’t think it is necessary. She has expressed no wish that I should ?”

“No; but she might like to be assured that her brother won’t be prosecuted for perjury.”

“Oh, set her mind at ease !”

“Show Mallard the letter from Mrs. Lessingham,” said Spence, with a twinkle of the eyes.

“I will read it to him.”

She did so. And the letter ran thus :

“Still no news ? I am uneasy, though there can be no rational doubt as to what form the news will take when it comes. The

material interests in question are enough to relieve us from anxiety. But I wish they would be quick and communicate with us.

“One reconciles one’s self to the inevitable, and, for my own part, the result of my own reflections is that I am something more than acquiescent. After all, granted that these two must make choice of each other, was it not in the fitness of things that they should act as they have done? For us comfortable folk, life is too humdrum; ought we not to be grateful to those who supply us with a strong emotion, and who remind us that there is yet poetry in the world? I should apologize for addressing such thoughts to *you*, dear Eleanor, for you have still the blessing of a young heart, and certainly do not lack poetry. I speak for myself, and after all I am much disposed to praise these young people for their unconventional behaviour.

“What if our darkest anticipations were fulfilled? Beyond all doubt they are now sincerely devoted to each other, and will

remain so for at least twelve months. Those twelve months will be worth a lifetime of level satisfaction. We shall be poor creatures in comparison when we utter our ‘Didn’t I tell you so?’

“Whilst in a confessing mood, I will admit that I had formed rather a different idea of Cecily; I was disposed to think of her as the modern woman who has put unreasoning passion under her feet, and therefore this revelation was at first a little annoying to me. But I see now that my view of her failed by incompleteness. The modern woman need by no means be a mere embodied intellect; she will choose to enjoy as well as to understand, and to enjoy greatly she will sacrifice all sorts of things that women have regarded as supremely important. Indeed, I cannot say that I am disappointed in Cecily; rightly seen, she has justified the system on which I educated her. My object was to teach her to think for herself, to be self-reliant. The *jeune fille*, according to

society's pattern, is my abhorrence: an ignorant, deceitful, vain, immoral creature. Cecily is as unlike that as possible; she has behaved independently and with sincerity. I really admire her very much, and hope that her life may not fall below its beginning.

"Let me hear as soon as a word reaches you. I am with charming people, and yet I think longingly of the delightful evenings at Villa Sannazaro, your music and your talk. You and your husband have a great place in my heart; you are of the salt of the earth. Spare me a little affection, for I am again a lonely woman."

This letter also was discussed, and its philosophy appreciated. Mallard spoke little; he had clasped his hands behind his head, and listened musingly.

There was no effusion in the leave-taking, though it might be for a long time. Warm clasping of hands, but little said.

"A good-bye for me to Mrs. Baske," was Mallard's last word.

And his haggard but composed face turned from Villa Sannazaro.

PART II.



CHAPTER I.

A CORNER OF SOCIETY,

IN a London drawing-room, where the murmur of urbane colloquy rose and fell, broken occasionally by the voice of the nomenclator announcing new arrivals, two ladies, seated in a recess, were exchanging confidences. One was a novelist of more ability than repute ; the other was a weekly authority on musical performances.

“ Her head is getting turned, poor girl. I feel sorry for her.”

“ Such ridiculous flattery ! And really it is difficult to understand. She is pretty, and speaks French ; neither the one thing nor the other is uncommon, I believe. Do you see anything remarkable in her ? ”

“ Well, she is rather more than pretty ; and there’s a certain cleverness in her

talk. But at her age this kind of thing is ruinous. I blame Mrs. Lessingham. She should bid her stay at home and mind her baby."

"By-the-bye, what truth is there in that story? The Naples affair, you know?"

"*N'en sais rien.* But I hear odd things about her husband. Mr. Bickerdike knew him a few years ago. He ran through a fortune, and fell into most disreputable ways of life. Somebody was saying that he got his living as 'bus-conductor, or something of the kind."

"I could imagine that, from the look of him."

It was Mrs. Lessingham's Wednesday evening. The house in Craven Hill opened its doors at ten o'clock, and until midnight there was no lack of company. Singular people, more or less; distinguished from society proper by the fact that all had a modicum of brains. Some came from luxurious homes, some from garrets. Visitors from Paris were frequent; their

presence made a characteristic of the salon. This evening, for instance, honour was paid by the hostess to M. Amédée Silvenoire, whose experiment in unromantic drama had not long ago gloriously failed at the Odéon ; and Madame Jacquelin, the violinist, was looked for.

Mrs. Lessingham had not passed a season in London for several years. When, at the end of April, she took this house, there came to live with her the widow and daughter of a man of letters who had died in poverty. She had known the Delphs in Paris, in the days when Cecily was with her, and in the winter just past she had come upon Irene Delph copying at the Louvre ; the girl showed a good deal of talent, but was hard beset by the difficulty of living whilst she worked. In the spirit of her generous brother, Mrs. Lessingham persuaded the two to come and live with her through the season ; a room in the house was a studio for Irene, who took to portraits. Mrs. Delph, a timid woman whose nerves

had failed under her misfortunes, did not appear on formal occasions like the present, but Irene was becoming an ornament of the drawing-room. To be sure, but for her good looks and her artistic aptitude, she would not have been here — no reason, that I know, for stinted praise of her friend's generosity.

An enjoyable thing to see Mrs. Lessingham in conversation with one of her French guests. She threw off full fifteen years, and looked thirty at most. Her handsome features had a vivid play of expression in harmony with the language she was speaking; her eyes were radiant as she phrased a thought which in English would have required many words for the—blunting of its point. M. Silvenoire, who—with the slight disadvantage of knowing no tongue but his own—was making a study of English social life, found himself at ease this evening for the first time since he had been in London. Encouraged to talk his best, he frankly and amusingly told Mrs.

Lessingham of the ideas he had formed regarding conversation in the drawing-rooms of English ladies.

“Civilization is spreading among us,” she replied, with a laugh. “Once or twice it has been my privilege to introduce young Frenchmen, who were studying our language, to English families abroad, and in those cases I privately recommended to them a careful study of Anthony Trollope’s novels, that they might learn what is permissible in conversation and what is not. But here and there in London you will find it possible to discuss things that interest reasonable beings.”

At the door sounded the name of “Mr. Bickerdike,” and there advanced towards the hostess a tall, ugly young man, known by repute to all the English people present. He was the author of a novel called “A Crown of Lilies,” which was much talked of just now, and excited no less ridicule than admiration. On the one hand, it was lauded for delicate purity and idealism ; on the other,

it was scoffed at for artificiality and affected refinement. Mrs. Lessingham had met him for the first time a week ago. Her invitation was not due to approval of his book, but to personal interest which the author moved in her ; she was curious to discover how far the idealism of "A Crown of Lilies" was a genuine fruit of the man's nature. Mr. Bickerdike's countenance did not promise clarity of soul ; his features were distinctly coarse, and the glance he threw round the room on entering made large demands.

Irene Delph was talking with a young married lady named Mrs. Travis ; they both regarded Mr. Bickerdike with close scrutiny.

"Who could have imagined such an author for the book !" murmured the girl, in wonder.

"I could, perfectly well," murmured back Mrs. Travis, with a smile which revealed knowledge of humanity.

"I pictured a very youthful man, with a face of effeminate beauty—probably a hectic colour in his cheeks."

“Such men don’t write ‘the novel of the season.’ This gentleman is very shrewd; he gauges the public. Some day, if he sees fit, he will write a brutal book, and it will have merit.”

Mr. Bickerdike unfortunately did not speak French, so M. Silvenoire was unable to exchange ideas with him. The Parisian, having learnt what this gentleman’s claims were, regarded him through his *pince-nez* with a subtle smile. But in a few moments he had something more interesting to observe.

“Mrs. Elgar,” cried the voice at the door.

Cecily was met half-way by her aunt.

“You are alone?”

“Reuben has a headache. Perhaps he will come to fetch me, but more likely not.”

All the eyes in the room had one direction. Alike those who ingenuously admired and those who wished to seem indifferent paid the homage of observation to Mrs. Elgar, as she stood exchanging greetings

with the friends who came forward. Yes, there was something more than attractive features and a pleasant facility of speech. In Cecily were blended a fresh loveliness and a grace as of maidenhood with the perfect charm of wedded youth. The air about her was charged with something finer than the delicate fragrance which caressed the senses. You had but to hear her speak, were it only the most ordinary phrase of courtesy, and that wonderful voice more than justified your profound interest. Strangers took her for a few years older than she was, not judging so much by her face as the finished ease of her manners; when she conversed, it was hard to think of her as only one and twenty.

“She is a little pale this evening,” said Irene to Mrs. Travis.

The other assented; then asked:

“Why don’t you paint her portrait?”

“Heaven forbid! I have quite enough discouragement in my attempts at painting, as it is.”

M. Silvenoire was bowing low, as Mrs. Lessingham presented him. To his delight, he heard his own language fluently, idiomatically spoken; he remarked, too, that Mrs. Elgar had a distinct pleasure in speaking it. She seated herself, and flattered him into ecstasies by the respect with which she received his every word. She had seen it mentioned in the *Figaro* that a new play of his was in preparation; when was it likely to be put on the stage? The theatre in London—of course, he understood that no one took it *au sérieux*?

The Parisian could do nothing but gaze about the room, following her movements, when their dialogue was at an end. Mon Dieu! And who, then, was Mr. Elgar? Might not one hope for an invitation to madame's assemblies? A wonderful people, these English, after all.

Mr. Bickerdike secured, after much impatience, the desired introduction. For reasons of his own, he made no mention of his earlier acquaintance with Elgar. Did

she know of it? In any case, she appeared not to, but spoke of things which did not interest Mr. Bickerdike in the least. At length he was driven to bring forward the one subject on which he desired her views.

“Have you, by chance, read my book, Mrs. Elgar?”

M. Silvenoire would have understood her smile; the Englishman thought it merely amiable, and prepared for the accustomed compliment.

“Yes, I have read it, Mr. Bickerdike. It seemed to me a charmingly written romance.”

The novelist, seated upon too low a chair, leaning forward so that his knees and chin almost touched, was not in himself a very graceful object; the contrast with his neighbour made him worse than grotesque. His visage was disagreeably animal as it smiled with condescension.

“You mean something by that,” he remarked, with awkward attempt at light fencing.

There was barely a perceptible movement of Cecily's brows.

"I try to mean something as often as I speak," she said, in an amused tone.

"In this case it is a censure. You take the side of those who find fault with my idealism."

"Not so ; I simply form my own judgment."

Mr. Bickerdike was nervous at all times in the society of a refined woman ; Mrs. Elgar's quiet rebukes brought the perspiration to his forehead, and made him rub his hands together. Like many a better man, he could not do justice to the parts he really possessed, save when sitting in solitude with a sheet of paper before him. Though he had a confused perception that Mrs. Elgar was punishing him for forcing her to speak of his book, he was unable to change the topic and so win her approval for his tact. In the endeavour to seem at ease, he became blunt.

"And what has your judgment to say on the subject ?"

“I think I have already told you, Mr. Bickerdike.”

“You mean by a romance a work that is not soiled with the common realism of to-day.”

“I am willing to mean that.”

“But you will admit, Mrs. Elgar, that my mode of fiction has as much to say for itself as that which you prefer?”

“In asking for one admission you take for granted another. That is a little confusing.”

It was made sufficiently so to Mr. Bickerdike. He thrust out his long legs, and exclaimed:

“I should be grateful to you if you would tell me what your view of the question really is—I mean, of the question at issue between the two schools of fiction.”

“But will you first make clear to me the characteristics of the school you represent?”

“It would take a long time to do that satisfactorily. I proceed on the assumption that fiction is poetry, and that poetry deals only with the noble and the pure.”

“Yes,” said Cecily, as he paused for a moment, “I see that it would take too long. You must deal with so many prejudices—such, for example, as that which supposes ‘King Lear’ and ‘Othello’ to be poems.”

Mr. Bickerdike began a reply, but it was too late; Mrs. Lessingham had approached with some one else who wished to be presented to Mrs. Elgar, and the novelist could only bite his lips as he moved away to find a more reverent listener.

It was not often that Cecily trifled in this way. As a rule, her manner of speech was direct and earnest. She had a very uncommon habit of telling the truth whenever it was possible; rather than utter smooth falsehoods, she would keep silence, and sometimes when to do so was to run much danger of giving offence. Beautiful women have very different ways of using the privilege their charm assures them; Cecily chose to make it a protection of her integrity. She was much criticized by acquaintances of her own sex. Some held

her presumptuous, conceited, spoilt by adulation; some accused her of bad taste and blue-stockings; some declared that she had no object but to win men's admiration and outshine women. Without a thought of such comments, she behaved as was natural to her. Where she felt her superiority, she made no pretence of appearing femininely humble. Yet persons like Mrs. Delph, who kept themselves in shadow and spoke only with simple kindness, knew well how unassuming Cecily was, and with what deference she spoke when good feeling dictated it. Or again, there was her manner with the people who, by the very respect with which they inspired her, gave her encouragement to speak without false restraint; such as Mr. Bird, the art critic, a grizzle-headed man with whom she sat for a quarter of an hour this evening, looking her very brightest and talking in her happiest vein, yet showing all the time her gratitude for what she learnt from his conversation.

It was nearly twelve o'clock when Mrs. Travis, who had made one or two careless efforts to draw near to Cecily, succeeded in speaking a word aside with her.

"I hope you didn't go to see me yesterday? I left home in the morning, and am staying with friends at Hampstead, not far from you."

"For long?"

"I don't know. I should like to talk to you, if I could. Shall you be driving back alone?"

"Yes. Will you come with me?"

"Thank you. Please let me know when you are going."

And Mrs. Travis turned away. In a few minutes Cecily went to take leave of her aunt.

"How is Clarence?" asked Mrs. Lessingham.

"Still better, I believe. I left him to-night without uneasiness."

"Oh, I had a letter this morning from Mrs. Spence. No talk of England yet. In

the autumn they are going to Greece, then for the winter to Sicily."

"Miriam with them?"

"As though it were a matter of course."

They both smiled. Then Cecily took leave of two or three other people, and quitted the room. Mrs. Travis followed her, and in a few minutes they were seated in the brougham.

Mrs. Travis had a face one could not regard without curiosity. It was not beautiful in any ordinary sense, but strange and striking and rich in suggestiveness. In the chance, flickering light that entered the carriage, she looked haggard, and at all times her thinness and pallor give her the appearance of suffering both in body and mind. Her complexion was dark, her hair of a rich brown; she had very large eyes, which generally wandered in an absent, restless, discontented way. If she smiled, it was with a touch of bitterness, and her talk was wont to be caustic. Cecily had only known her for a few weeks, and did

not feel much drawn to her, but she compassionated her for sorrows known and suspected. Though only six and twenty, Mrs. Travis had been married seven years, and had had two children; the first died at birth, the second was killed by diphtheria. Her husband Cecily had never seen, but she heard disagreeable things of him, and Mrs. Travis herself had dropped hints which signified domestic unhappiness.

After a minute or two of silence, Cecily was beginning to speak on some indifferent subject, when her companion interrupted her.

“Will you let me tell you something about myself?”

“Whatever you wish, Mrs. Travis,” Cecily answered, with sympathy.

“I’ve left my husband. Perhaps you thought of that?”

“No.”

The sudden disclosure gave her a shock. She had the sensation of standing for the first time face to face with one of the sterner miseries of life.

“I did it once before,” pursued the other, “two years ago. Then I was foolish enough to be wheedled back again. That shan’t happen this time.”

“Have you really no choice but to do this?” Cecily asked, with much earnestness.

“Oh, I could have stayed if I had chosen. He doesn’t beat me. I have as much of my own way as I could expect. Perhaps you’ll think me unreasonable. A Turkish woman would.”

Cecily sat mute. She could not but resent the harsh tone in which she was addressed, in spite of her pity.

“It’s only that I suffer in my self-respect—a little,” Mrs. Travis continued. “Of course, this is no reason for taking such a step, except to those who have suffered in the same way. Perhaps you would like to stop the carriage and let me leave you?”

“Your suffering makes you unjust to me,” replied Cecily, much embarrassed by this strange impulsiveness. “Indeed I

sympathize with you. I think it quite possible that you are behaving most rightly."

"You don't maintain, then, that it is a wife's duty to bear every indignity from her husband?"

"Surely not. On the contrary, I think there are some indignities which no wife *ought* to bear."

"I'm glad to hear that. I had a feeling that you would think in this way, and that's why I wanted to talk to you. Of course, you have only the evidence of my word for believing me."

"I can see that you are very unhappy, and the cause you name is quite sufficient."

"In one respect, I am very lucky. I have a little money of my own, and that enables me to go and live by myself. Most women haven't this resource; many are compelled to live in degradation only for want of it. I should like to see how many homes would be broken up, if all women were suddenly made independent in the

same way that I am. How I should enjoy that ! I hate the very word ‘ marriage ! ’ ”

Cecily averted her face, and said nothing. After a pause, her companion continued in a calm voice :

“ You can’t sympathize with that, I know. And you are comparing my position with your own.”

No answer was possible, for Mrs. Travis had spoken the truth.

“ In the first year of my marriage, I used to do the same whenever I heard of any woman who was miserable with her husband.”

“ Is there no possibility of winning back your husband ? ” Cecily asked, in a veiled voice.

“ Winning him back ? Oh, he is affectionate enough. But you mean winning him back to faithfulness. My husband happens to be the average man, and the average man isn’t a pleasant person to talk about, in this respect.”

“ Are you not too general in your condemnation, Mrs. Travis ? ”

"I am content you should think so. You are very young still, and there's no good in making the world ugly for you as long as it can seem rosy."

"Please don't use that word," said Cecily, with emphasis. It annoyed her to be treated as immature in mind. "I am the last person to take rosy views of life. But there is something between the distrust to which you are driven by misery and the optimism of foolish people."

"We won't argue about it. Every woman must take life as she finds it. To me it is a hateful weariness. I hope I mayn't have much of it still before me; what there is, I will live in independence. You know Mrs. Calder?"

"Yes."

"Her position is the same as mine has been, but she has more philosophy; she lets things take their course, just turning her eyes away."

"That is ignoble, hateful!" exclaimed Cecily.

“ So I think, but women as a rule don’t. At all events, they are content to whine a little, and do nothing. Poor wretches, what *can* they do, as I said ? ”

“ They can go away, and, if need be, starve.”

“ They have children.”

Cecily became mute.

“ Will you let me come and see you now and then ? ” Mrs. Travis asked presently.

“ Come whenever you feel you would like to,” Cecily answered, rousing herself from reverie.

The house in which Mrs. Travis now lived was a quarter of an hour’s drive beyond that of the Elgars ; she would have alighted and walked, making nothing of it, but of course Cecily could not allow this. The coachman was directed to make the circuit. When Cecily reached home, it was after one o’clock.



CHAPTER II.

THE PROPRIETIES DEFENDED.

THE house was in Belsize Park. Light shone through the blind of one of the upper windows, but the rest of the front was lifeless. Cecily's ring at the bell sounded distinctly; it was answered at once by a maid-servant, who said that Mr. Elgar was still in the library. Having spoken a few words, ending with a kind good night, Cecily passed through the hall and opened the library door.

A reading-lamp made a bright sphere on the table, but no one sat within its rays. After a fruitless glance round the room, Cecily called her husband's name. There was a sound of moving, and she saw that Reuben was on a sofa which the shadow veiled.

“Have you been asleep?” she asked merrily, as she approached him.

He stood up and stretched himself, muttering.

“Why ever didn’t you go to bed, poor boy? I’m dreadfully late; I went out of my way to take some one home.”

“Who was that?” Elgar inquired, coming forward and seating himself on the corner of the writing-table.

“Mrs. Travis. She has come to stay with friends at Hampstead. But to bed, to bed! You look like Hamlet when he came and frightened Ophelia. Have you had an evil dream?”

“That’s the truth; I have.”

“What about?”

“Oh, a stupid jumble.” He moved the lamp-shade, so that the light fell suddenly full upon her. “Why have you made such friends all at once with Mrs. Travis?”

“How is your headache?”

“I don’t know—much the same. Did she ask you to take her home?”

“Yes, she did—or suggested it, at all events.”

“Why has she come to Hampstead?”

“How can I tell, dear? Put the lamp out, and let us go.”

He sat swinging his leg. The snatch of uncomfortable sleep had left him pale and swollen-eyed, and his hair was tumbled.

“Who was there to night?”

“Several new people. Amédée Silve-noire—the dramatist, you know; an interesting man. He paid me the compliment of refraining from compliments on my French. Madame Jacquelin, a stout and very plain woman, who told us anecdotes of George Sand; remind me to repeat them to-morrow. And Mr. Bickerdike, the pillar of idealism.”

“Bickerdike was there?” Elgar exclaimed, with an air of displeasure.

“He didn’t refer to his acquaintance with you. I wonder why not?”

“Did you talk to the fellow?”

“Rather pertly, I’m afraid. He was

silly enough to ask me what I thought of his book, though I hadn't mentioned it. I put on my superior air and snubbed him ; it was like tapping a frog on the head each time it pokes up out of the water. He will go about and say what an insufferable person that Mrs. Elgar is."

Reuben was silent for a while.

"I don't like your associating with such people," he said suddenly. "I wish you didn't go there. It's all very well for a woman like your aunt to gather about her all the disreputable men and women who claim to be of some account ; but they are not fit companions for you. I don't like it at all."

She looked at him in astonishment, with bewildered eyes that were on the verge of laughter.

"What *are* you talking about, Reuben?"

"I'm quite serious." He rose and began to walk about the room. "And it surprised me that you didn't think of staying at home this evening. I said nothing, because

I wanted to see whether it would occur to you that you oughtn't to go alone."

"How should such a thing occur to me? Surely I am as much at home in aunt's house as in my own? I can hardly believe that you mean what you say."

"You will understand it if you think for a moment. A year ago you wouldn't have dreamt of going out at night when I stayed at home. But you find the temptation of society irresistible. People admire you and talk about you and crowd round you, and you enjoy it—never mind who the people are. Presently we shall be seeing your portrait in the shop-windows. I noticed what a satisfaction it was to you when your name was mentioned among the other people in that idiotic society journal."

Cecily laughed, but not quite so naturally as she wished it to sound.

"This is too absurd! Your dream has unsettled your wits, Reuben. How could I imagine that you had begun to think of me in such a light? You used to give me

credit for at least average common sense. I can't talk about it ; I am ashamed to defend myself."

He had not spoken angrily, but in a curiously dogged tone, with awkward emphasis, as if struggling to say what did not come naturally to his lips. Still walking about, and keeping his eyes on the floor, he continued in the same half-embarrassed way.

"There's no need for you to defend yourself. I don't exactly mean to blame you, but to point out a danger."

"Forgetting that you degrade my character in doing so."

"Nothing of the kind, Cecily. But remember how young you are. You know very little of the world, and often see things in an ideal light. It is your tendency to idealize. You haven't the experience necessary to a woman who goes about in promiscuous society."

Cecily knitted her brows.

"Instead of using that vague, commonplace language--which I never thought to

hear from *you*—I wish you would tell me exactly what you mean. What things do I see in an ideal light? That means, I suppose, that I am childishly ignorant of common evils in the world. You couldn't speak otherwise if I had just come out of a convent. And, indeed, you don't believe what you say. Speak more simply, Reuben. Say that you distrust my discretion."

"To a certain extent, I do."

"Then there is no more to be said, dear. Please to tell me in future exactly what you wish me to do, and what to avoid. I will go to school to your prudence."

The clock ticked very loudly, and, before the silence was again broken, chimed half-past one.

"Let me give you an instance of what I mean," said Elgar, again seating himself on the table and fingering his watch-chain nervously. "You have been making friends with Mrs. Travis. Now, you are certainly quite ignorant of her character. You don't know that she left home not long ago."

Cecily asked in a low voice :

“ And why didn't you tell me this before ? ”

“ Because I don't choose to talk with you about such disagreeable things.”

“ Then I begin to see what the difficulty is between us. It is not I who idealize things, but you. Unless I am much mistaken, this is the common error of husbands—of those who are at heart the best. They wish their wives to remain children, as far as possible. Everything ‘ disagreeable ’ must be shunned—and we know what the result often is. But I had supposed all this time that you and I were on other terms. I thought you regarded me as not quite the everyday woman. In some things it is certain you do ; why not in the most important of all ? Knowing that I was likely to see Mrs. Travis often, it was your duty to tell me what you knew of her.”

Elgar kept silence.

“ Now let me give you another version of that story,” Cecily continued. “ To-night she has been telling me about herself.

She says that she left home because her husband was unfaithful to her. I think the reason quite sufficient, and I told her so. But there is something more. She has again been driven away. She has come to live at Hampstead because her home is intolerable, and she says that nothing will ever induce her to return."

"And this has been the subject of your conversation as you drove back? Then I think such an acquaintance is very unsatisfactory, and it must come to an end."

"Please to tell me why you spoke just now as if Mrs. Travis were to blame."

"I have heard that she was."

"Heard from whom?"

"That doesn't matter. There's a doubt about it, and she's no companion for you."

"As you think it necessary to lay commands on me, I shall of course obey you. But I believe Mrs. Travis is wronged by the rumours you have heard; I believe she acted then, and has done now, just as it behoved her to."

“And you have been encouraging her?”

“Yes, on the assumption that she told me the truth. She asked if she might come and see me, and I told her to do so whenever she wished. I needn’t say that I shall write and withdraw this invitation.”

Elgar hesitated before replying.

“I’m afraid you can’t do that. You have tact enough to end the acquaintance gradually.”

“Indeed I have not, Reuben. I either condemn her or pity her; I can’t shuffle contemptibly between the two.”

“Of course you prefer to pity her!” he exclaimed impatiently. “There comes in the idealism of which I was speaking. The vulgar woman’s instinct would be to condemn her; naturally enough, you take the opposite course. You like to think nobly of people, with the result that more often than not you will be wrong. You don’t know the world.”

“And I am very young; pray finish the formula. But why do you prefer to take

the side of 'the vulgar woman' of whom you speak? I see that you have no evidence against Mrs. Travis; why lean towards condemnation?"

"Well, I'll put it in another way. A woman who lives apart from her husband is always amid temptations, always in doubtful circumstances. Friends who put faith in her may, of course, keep up their intimacy; but a slight acquaintance, and particularly one in your position, will get harm by associating with her. This is simple and obvious enough."

"If you knew for certain that she was blameless, you would speak in the same way?"

"If it regarded you, I should. Not if Mrs. Lessingham were in question."

"That is a distinction which repeats your distrust. We won't say any more about it. I will bear in mind my want of experience, and in future never act without consulting you."

She moved towards the door.

“ You are coming ? ”

“ Look here, Ciss, you are not so foolish as to misunderstand me. When I said that I distrusted your discretion, I meant, of course, that you might innocently do things which would make people talk about you. There is no harm in reminding you of the danger.”

“ Perhaps not ; though it would be more like yourself to scorn people’s talk.”

“ That is only possible if we chose to go back to our life of solitude. I’m afraid it wouldn’t suit you very well now.”

“ No ; I am far too eager to see my name in fashionable lists. Has not all my life pointed to that noble ambition ? ”

She regarded him with a smile from her distance, a smile that trembled a little about her lips, and in which her clear eyes had small part. Elgar, without replying, began to turn down the lamp.

“ This is what has made you so absent and uneasy for the last week or two ? ” Cecily added.

The lamp was extinguished.

“Yes, it is,” answered Elgar’s voice in the darkness. “I don’t like the course things have been taking.”

“Then you were quite right to speak plainly. Be at rest; you shall have no more anxiety.”

She opened the door, and they went upstairs together. In the bedroom Cecily found her little boy sleeping quietly; she bent above him for a few moments, and with soft fingers smoothed the coverlet.

There was no further conversation between them—except that Cecily just mentioned the news her aunt had received from Mrs. Spence.

At breakfast they spoke of the usual subjects, in the usual way. Elgar had his ride, amused himself in the library till luncheon, lolled about the drawing-room whilst Cecily played, went to his club, came back to dinner,—all in customary order. Neither look nor word, from him or Cecily, made allusion to last night’s incident.

The next morning, when breakfast was over, he came behind his wife's chair and pointed to an envelope she had opened.

"What strange writing! Whose is it?"

"From Mrs. Travis."

He moved away, and Cecily rose. As she was passing him, he said:

"What has she to say to you?"

"She acknowledges the letter I sent her yesterday morning, that's all."

"You wrote—in the way you proposed?"

"Certainly."

He allowed her to pass without saying anything more.





CHAPTER III.

GRADATION.

DURING the first six months of her wedded life, Cecily wrote from time to time in a handsomely bound book which had a little silver lock to it. She was then living at the seaside in Cornwall, and Reuben occasionally went out for some hours with the fishers, or took a long solitary ride inland, just to have the delight of returning to his home after a semblance of separation ; in his absence, Cecily made a confidant of the clasped volume. On some of its fair pages were verses, written when verse came to her more easily than prose, but read not even to him who occasioned them. A passage or two of the unrhymed thoughts, with long periods of interval, will aid you in pursuing her mental history.

“I have no more doubts, and take shame to myself for those I ever entertained. Presently I will confess to him how my mind was tossed and troubled on that flight from Capri; I now feel able to do so, and to make of the confession one more delight. It was impossible for me not to be haunted by the fear that I had yielded to impulse, and acted unworthily of one who could reflect. I had not a doubt of my lover, but the foolish pride which is in a girl's heart whispered to me that I had been too eager—had allowed myself to be won too readily; that I should have been more precious to him if more difficulty had been put in his way. Would it not have been good to give him proof of constancy through long months of waiting? But the secret was that I dreaded to lose him. I reproached him for want of faith in my steadfastness; but just as well he might have reproached me. It was horrible to think of his going back into the world and living among people of whom I knew

nothing. I knew in some degree what his life had been ; by force of passionate love I understood, or thought I understood, him ; and I feared most ignobly.

“ And I was putting myself in opposition to all those older and more experienced people. How could I help distrusting myself at times ? I saw them all looking coldly and reproachfully at me. Here again my pride had something to say. They would smile among themselves, and tell each other that they had held a mistakenly high opinion of me. That was hard to bear. I like to be thought much of ; it is delicious to feel that people respect me, that they apply other judgments to me than to girls in general. Mr. Mallard hurt me more than he thought in pretending—I feel sure he only pretended—to regard my words as trivial. How it rejoices me that there are some things I know better than my husband does ! I have read of women liking to humble themselves, and in a way I can understand it ; I do like to *say* that

he is far above me—oh ! and I mean it, I believe it ; but the joy of joys is to see him look at me with admiration. I rejoice that I have beauty ; I rejoice that I have read much, and can think for myself now and then, and sometimes say a thing that every one would not think of. Suppose I were an uneducated girl, not particularly good-looking, and a man loved me ; well, in that case perhaps the one joy would be mere worship of him and intense gratitude—blind belief in his superiority to every other man that lived. But then Reuben would never have loved me ; he must have something to admire, to stand a little in awe of. And for this very reason, perhaps I feel such constant—self-esteem, for that is the only word.” . . .

“ All the doubts and fears are over. I acted rightly, and because I obeyed my passion. The poets are right, and all the prudent people only grovel in their wordly wisdom. It may not be true for every one,

but for me to love and be loved, infinitely, with the love that conquers everything, is the sole end of life. It is enough ; come what will, if love remain nothing else is missed. In the direst poverty, we should be as much to each other as we are now. If he died, I would live only to remember the days I passed with him. What folly, what a crime, it would have been to waste two years, as though we were immortal !

“ I never think of Capri but I see it in the light of a magnificent sunrise. Beloved, sacred island, where the morning of my life indeed began ! No spot in all the earth has beauty like yours ; no name of any place sounds to me as yours does ! ” . . .

“ I know that our life cannot always be what it is now. This is a long honeymoon ; we do not walk on the paths that are trodden by ordinary mortals ; the sky above us is not the same that others see as they go about their day's business or pleasure. By what process shall we fall to the com-

mon existence? We have all our wants provided for; there is no need for my husband to work that he may earn money, no need for me to take anxious thought about expenses; so that we are tempted to believe that life will always be the same. That cannot be; I am not so idle as to hope it.

“He certainly has powers which should be put to use. We have talked much of things that he might possibly do, and I am sure that before long his mind will hit the right path. I am so greedy of happiness that even what we enjoy does not suffice me; I want my husband to distinguish himself among men, that I may glory in his honour. Yesterday he told me that my own abilities exceeded his, and that I was more likely to make use of them; but in this case my ambition takes a humble form. Even if I were sure that I could, say, write a good book, I would infinitely prefer him to do it and receive the reward of it. I like him to *say* such things, but in fact

he must be more than I. Do I need a justification of the love I bear him? Surely not; that would be a contradiction of love. But it is true that I would gladly have him justify to others my belief in his superiority.

“And yet—why not be content with what is well? If *he* could remain so; but will he? We have a long life before us, and I know that it cannot be all honeymoon.”—

“I have been reading a French novel that has made me angry—in spite of my better sense. Of course, it is not the first book of the kind that I have read, but it comes home to me now. What right has this author to say that no man was ever absolutely faithful? It is a commonplace, but how can any one have evidence enough to justify such a statement? I shall not speak of it to Reuben, for I don’t care to think long about it. Does that mean, I wonder, that I am afraid to think of it?

“Well, I had rather have been taught to read and think about everything, than

be foolishly ignorant as so many women are. This French author would laugh at my confidence, but I could laugh back at his narrow cynicism. He knows nothing of love in its highest sense. I am firm in my optimism, which has a very different base from that of ignorance.

“This does not concern me ; I won’t occupy my mind with it ; I won’t read any more of the cynics. My husband loves me, and I believe his love incapable of receiving a soil. If ever I cease to believe that, time enough then to be miserable and to fight out the problem.”

The end of the six months found them still undecided as to where they should fix a permanent abode. In no part of England had either of them relatives or friends whose proximity would be of any value. Cecily inclined towards London, feeling that there only would her husband find incentives to exertion ; but Reuben was more disposed to settle somewhere on the

Continent. He talked of going back to Italy, living in Florence, and — writing something new about the Renaissance. Cecily shook her head; Italy she loved, and she had seen nothing of it north of Naples, but it was the land of lotus-eaters. They would go there again, but not until life had seriously shaped itself.

Whilst they talked and dreamed, decision came to them in the shape of Mrs. Lessingham. Without warning, she one day presented herself at their lodgings, having come direct from Paris. Her spirits were delightful; she could not have behaved more graciously had this marriage been the one desire of her life. The result of her private talk with Cecily was that within a week all three travelled down to London; there they remained for a fortnight, then went on to Paris. Mrs. Lessingham's quarters were in Rue de Belle Chasse, and the Elgars found a suitable dwelling in the same street.

Their child was born, and for a few

months all questions were postponed to that of its health and Cecily's. The infant gave a good deal of trouble, was anything but robust; the mother did not regain her strength speedily. The first three months of the new year were spent at Bordighera; then came three months of Paris; then the family returned to England (without Mrs. Lessingham), and established themselves in the house in Belsize Park.

The immediate effect of paternity upon Elgar was amusing. His self-importance visibly increased. He spoke with more gravity; whatever step he took was seriously considered; if he read a newspaper, it was with an air of sober reflection.

"This is the turning-point in his life," Cecily said to her aunt. "He seems to me several years older; don't you notice it? I am quite sure that as soon as things are in order again he will begin to work."

And the prophecy seemed to find fulfilment. Not many days after their taking possession of the English home, Reuben

declared a project that his mind had been forming. It was not, to be sure, thoroughly fashioned; its limits must necessarily be indeterminate until fixed by long and serious study; but what he had in view was to write a history of the English mind in its relation to Puritanism.

“I have a notion, Ciss, that this is the one thing into which I can throw all my energies. The one need of my intellectual life is to deal a savage blow at the influences which ruined all my early years. You can't look at the matter quite as I do; you don't know the fierce hatred with which I am moved when I look back. If I am to do literary work at all, it must be on some subject which deeply concerns me—me myself, as an individual. I feel sure that my bent isn't to fiction; I am not objective enough. But I enjoy the study of history, and I have a good deal of acuteness. If I'm not mistaken, I can make a brilliant book, a book that will excite hatred and make my name known.”

They were sitting in the library, late at night. As usual when he was stirred, Reuben paced up and down the room and gesticulated.

“Do you mean it to be a big book?” Cecily asked, after reflection.

“Not very big. I should have French models before me, rather than English.”

“It would take you a long time to prepare.”

“Two or three years, perhaps. But what does that matter? I shall work a good deal at the British Museum. It will oblige me to be away from you a good deal, but——”

“You mustn’t trouble about that. I have my own work. If your mornings are regularly occupied, I shall be able to make fixed plans of study; there are so many things I want to work at.”

“Capital! It’s high time we came to that. And then, you know, you might be able to give me substantial help—reading, making notes, and so on—if you cared to.”

Cecily smiled.

“ Yes, if I care to.—But hasn’t the subject been dealt with already ? ”

“ Oh, of course, in all sorts of ways. But not in *my* way. No man ever wrote about it with such energy of hatred as I shall bring to the task.”

Cecily was musing.

“ It won’t be a history in the ordinary sense,” she said. “ You will make no pretence of historic calm and impartiality.”

“ Not I, indeed ! My book shall be cited as a splendid example of *odium antitheologicum*. There are passages of eloquence rolling in my mind ! And this is just the time for such a work. Throughout intellectual England, Puritanism is dead ; but we know how vigorously it survives among the half-educated classes. My book shall declare the emancipation of all the better minds, and be a help to those who are struggling upwards. It will be a demand, also, for a new literature, free from the absurd restraints that Puritanism has put upon us. All the younger writers will rally about me. It

shall be a 'movement.' The name of my book shall be a watchword."

They talked about it till one in the morning.

For several weeks Elgar was constantly at the Museum. He read prodigiously; he brought home a great quantity of notes; every night Cecily and he talked over his acquisitions, and excited themselves. But the weather grew oppressively hot, and it was plain that they could not carry out the project of remaining in town all through the autumn. Already Reuben was languishing in his zeal, when little Clarence had a sudden and alarming illness. As soon as possible, all went off to the seaside.

Since his work had begun, Reuben's interest in the child had fallen off. Its ailments were soon little more than an annoyance to him; Cecily perceived this, and seldom spoke on the subject. The fact of the sudden illness affording an opportunity for rest led him to express more solici-

tude than he really felt, but when the child got back into its normal state, Reuben was more plainly indifferent to it than ever. He spoke impatiently if the mother's cares occupied her when he wished for her society.

"A baby isn't a rational creature," he said once. "When he is old enough to begin to be educated, that will be a different thing. At present he is only a burden. Perhaps you think me an unfatherly brute?"

"No; I can understand you quite well. I should very often be impatient myself if I had no servants to help me."

"What a horrible thought! Suppose, Ciss, we all of a sudden lost everything, and we had to go and live in a garret, and I had to get work as a clerk at five and twenty shillings a week. How soon should we hate the sight of each other, and the sound of each other's voices?"

"It might come to that," replied Cecily, with half a smile. "Perhaps."

"There's no doubt about it."

Cecily remembered something she had

written in the book with the silver lock—a book which had not been opened for a long time.

“I used to think nothing could bring that about. And I am not sure yet.”

“I should behave like a ruffian. I know myself well enough.”

“I think that would kill my love in time.”

“Of course it would. How can any one love what is not lovable?”

“Yet we hear,” suggested Cecily, “of wretched women remaining devoted to husbands who all but murder them now and then.”

“You are not so foolish as to call *that* love! That is mere unreasoning and degraded habit—the same kind of thing one may find in a dog.”

“Has love anything to do with reason, Reuben?”

“As I understand it, it has everything to do with reason. Animal passion has not, of course; but love is made of that with

something added. Can my reason discover any argument why I should not love you? I won't say that it might not, some day, and then my love would by so much be diminished."

"You believe that reason is free to exercise itself, where love is in possession?"

"I believe that love can only come when reason invites. Of course, we are talking of love between men and women; the word has so many senses. In this highest sense, it is one of the rarest of things. How many wives and husbands love each other? Not one pair in five thousand. In the average pair that have lived together as long as we have, there is not only mutual criticism, but something even of mutual dislike. That makes love impossible. Habit takes its place."

"Happily for the world."

"I don't know. Perhaps so. It is an ignoble necessity; but then, the world largely consists of ignoble creatures."

Cecily reflected often on this conversa-

tion. Was there any significance in such reasonings? It gave her keen pleasure to hear Reuben maintain such a view, but did it mean anything? If, in meditating about him, she discovered characteristics of his which she could have wished to change, which in themselves were certainly not lovable, had she in that moment ceased to love him, in love's highest sense?

But in that case love might be self-deception. In that case, perfect love was impossible save as a result of perfect knowledge.

What part had reason in the impulses which possessed her from her first meeting with Reuben in Italy, unless that name were given to the working of mysterious affinities, afterwards to be justified by experience?

Cecily had been long content to accept love as an ultimate fact of her being. But it was not Reuben's arguments only that led her to ponder its nature and find names for its qualities. By this time she had

become conscious that her love as a wife was somehow altered, modified, since she had been a mother. The time of passionate reveries was gone by. She no longer wrote verses. The book was locked up and kept hidden ; if ever she resumed her diary, it must be in a new volume, for that other was sacred to an undivided love. It would now have been mere idle phrasing, to say that Reuben was all in all to her. And she could not think of this without some sadness.

To the average woman maternity is absorbing. Naturally so, for the average woman is incapable of poetical passion, and only too glad to find something that occupies her thoughts from morning to night, a relief from the weariness of her unfruitful mind. It was not to be expected that Cecily, because she had given birth to a child, should of a sudden convert herself into a combination of wet and dry nurse, after the common model. The mother's love was strong in her, but it could not

destroy, nor even keep in long abeyance, those intellectual energies which characterized her. Had she been constrained to occupy herself ceaselessly with the demands of babyhood, something more than impatience would shortly have been roused in her : she would have rebelled against the conditions of her sex ; the gentle melancholy with which she now looked back upon the early days of marriage would have become a bitter protest against her slavery to nature. These possibilities in the modern woman correspond to that spirit in the modern man which is in revolt against the law of labour. You easily picture Reuben Elgar reduced to the necessity of toiling for daily bread—that is to say, brought down from his pleasant heights of civilization to the dull plain where nature tells a man that if he would eat he must first sweat at the furrow ; you hear his fierce objurgations, his haughty railing against the gods. Cecily did not represent that extreme type of woman to whom the bearing of children

has become in itself repugnant; but she was very far removed from that other type which the world at large still makes its ideal of the feminine. With what temper would she have heard the lady in her aunt's drawing-room, who was of opinion that she should "stay at home and mind the baby"? Education had made her an individuality; she was nurtured into the disease of thought. This child of hers showed in the frail tenure on which it held its breath how unfit the mother was for fulfilling her natural functions. Both parents seemed in admirable health, yet their offspring was a poor, delicate, nervous creature, formed for exquisite sensibility to every evil of life. Cecily saw this, and partly understood it; her heart was heavy through the long anxious nights passed in watching by the cradle.

When they returned to London, Reuben at first made a pretence of resuming his work. He went now and then to the reading-room, and at home shut him-

self up in the study ; but he no longer voluntarily talked of his task. Cecily knew what had happened ; the fatal lack of perseverance had once more declared itself. For some weeks she refrained from inviting his confidence, but of necessity they spoke together at last. Reuben could no longer disguise the ennui under which he was labouring. Instead of sitting in the library, he loitered about the drawing-room ; he was often absent through the whole day, and Cecily knew that he had not been at the Museum.

“ I’m at a stand-still,” he admitted, when the opportunity came. “ I don’t see my way so clearly as at first. I must take up some other subject for a time, and rest my mind.”

They had no society worth speaking of. Mrs. Lessingham had supplied them with a few introductions, but these people were now out of town. Earlier in the year neither of them had cared to be assiduous in discharging social obligations, with the

natural result that little notice was taken of them in turn. Reuben had resumed two or three of his old connections; a bachelor acquaintance now and then came to dine; but this was not the kind of society they needed. Impossible for them to utter the truth, and confess that each other's companionship was no longer all-sufficient. Had Reuben been veritably engaged in serious work, Cecily might have gone on for a long time with her own studies before she wearied for lack of variety and friendly voices; as it was, the situation became impossible.

"Wouldn't you like to belong to a club?" she one day asked.

And Reuben caught at the suggestion. Not long ago, it would have caused him to smile rather scornfully.

Cecily had lost her faith in the great militant book on Puritanism. Thinking about it, when it had been quite out of her mind for a few days, she saw the project in a light of such absurdity that,

in spite of herself, she laughed. It was laughter that pained her, like a sob. No, that was not the kind of work for him. What was?

She would think rather of her child and its future. If Clarence lived—if he lived—she herself would take charge of his education for the first years. She must read the best books that had been written on the training of children's minds; everything should be smoothed for him by skilful methods. There could be little doubt that he would prove a quick child, and the delight of watching his progress! She imagined him a boy of ten, bright, trustful, happy; he would have no nearer friend than his mother; between him and her should exist limitless confidence. But a firm hand would be necessary; he would exhibit traits inherited from his father——

Cecily remembered the day when she first knew that she did not wish him to be altogether like his father. Perhaps in no other way could she have come to so clear

an understanding of Reuben's character—at all events, of those parts of it which had as yet revealed themselves in their wedded life. She thought of him with an impartiality which had till of late been impossible. And then it occurred to her: Had the same change come over his mind concerning her? Did he feel secret dissatisfactions? If he had a daughter, would he say to himself that in this and that he would wish her not to resemble her mother?

About once in three months they received a letter from Miriam, addressed always to Cecily. She was living still with the Spences, and still in Italy. Her letters offered no explanation of this singular fact; indeed, they threw as little light as was possible on the state of her mind, so brief were they, and so closely confined to statements of events. Still, it was clear that Miriam no longer shrank from the study of profane things. Of Bartles she never spoke.

Mrs. Spence also wrote to Cecily, the kind of letter to be expected from her, delightful in the reading and pleasant in the memory. But she said nothing significant concerning Miriam.

“Would they welcome us, if we went to see them?” Cecily asked, one cheerless day this winter—it was Clarence’s birthday.

“You can’t take the child,” answered Reuben, with some discontent.

“No; I should not dare to. And it is just as impossible to leave him with any one. In another year, perhaps.”

Mrs. Lessingham occasionally mentioned Miriam in her letters, and always with a jest. “I strongly suspect she is studying Greek. Is she, perchance, the author of that delightful paper on ‘Modern Paganism,’ in the current *Fortnightly*? Something strange awaits us, be sure of that.”

The winter dragged to its end, and with the spring came Mrs. Lessingham herself. Instantly the life of the Elgars underwent

a complete change. The vivacious lady from Paris saw in the twinkling of an eye how matters stood ; she considered the situation perilous, and set to work most efficaciously to alter it. With what result, you are aware. The first incident of any importance in the new life was that which has already been related, yet something happened one day at the Academy of which it is worth while speaking.

Cecily had looked in her catalogue for the name of a certain artist, and had found it ; he exhibited one picture only. Walking on through the rooms with her husband, she came at length to the number she had in mind, and paused before it.

“ Whose is that ? ” Reuben inquired, looking at the same picture.

“ Mr. Mallard’s,” she answered, with a smile, meeting his eyes.

“ Old Mallard’s ? Really ? I was wondering whether he had anything this year.”

He seemed to receive the information with genuine pleasure. A little to Cecily’s

surprise, for the name was never mentioned between them, and she had felt uneasy in uttering it. The picture was a piece of coast-scenery in Norway, very grand, cold, desolate ; not at all likely to hold the gaze of Academy visitors, but significant enough for the few who see with the imagination.

“ Nobody looks at it, you notice,” said Elgar, when they had stood on the spot for five minutes.

“ Nobody.”

Yet, as soon as they had spoken, an old and a young lady come in front of them, and they heard the young lady say, as she pointed to Mallard’s canvas :

“ Where is that, mamma ? ”

“ Oh, Land’s End, or some such place,” was the careless reply. “ *Do* just look at that *sweet* little creature playing with the dog ! Look at its collar ! And that ribbon ! ”

Reuben turned away and muttered contemptuous epithets ; Cecily cast a haughty and angry glance at the speaker. They passed on, and for the present spoke no more

of Mallard ; but Cecily thought of him, and would have liked to return to the picture before leaving. There was a man who *did* something, and something worth the doing. Reuben must have had a thought not unlike this, for he said, later in the same day :

“ I’m sorry I never took up painting. I believe I could have made something of it. To a certain extent, you see, it is a handicraft that any man may learn ; if one can handle the tools, there’s always the incentive to work and produce. By-the-bye, why do you never draw nowadays ? ”

“ I hold the opinion of Miss Denyer—I wonder what’s become of her, poor girl?—that it’s no use ‘ pottering.’ Strange how a casual word can affect one. I’ve never cared to draw since she spoke of my ‘ pottering.’ ”

This day was the last on which Reuben was quite his wonted self. Cecily, who was not studying him closely just now, did not for a while observe any change, but in the end it forced itself upon her attention. She

said nothing, thinking it not impossible that he was again dissatisfied with the fruitlessness of his life, and had been made to feel it more strongly by associating with so many new people. Any sign of that kind was still grateful to her.

She knew now how amiss was her interpretation. The truth she could not accept as she would have done a year ago; it would then have seemed more than pardonable, as proving that Reuben's love of her could drive him into grotesque inconsistencies. But now she only felt it an injury, and in sitting down to write her painful letter to Mrs. Travis, she acted for the first time in deliberate resentment of her husband's conduct.

When the reply from Mrs. Travis instructed him in what had been done, Reuben left the house, and did not return till late at night. Cecily stayed at home, idle. Visitors called in the afternoon, but she received no one. After her solitary dinner, she spent weary hours, now in one

room, now in another, unable to occupy herself in any way. At eleven o'clock she went down to the library, resolving to wait there for Reuben's return.

She heard him enter, and heard the servant speaking with him. He came into the room, closed the door, and sauntered forwards, his hands in his pockets.

"Why didn't you tell me you would be away all day?" Cecily asked, without stress of remonstrance.

"I didn't know that I should be."

He took his favourite position on the corner of the table. Examining him, Cecily saw that his face expressed ennui rather than active displeasure; there was a little sullenness about his lips, but the knitting of his brows was not of the kind that threatens tempest.

"Where have you been, dear?"

"At the Museum, the club, and a music-hall."

"A music-hall?" she repeated, in surprise.

“Why not? I had to get through the time somehow. I was in a surly temper; if I'd come home sooner, I should have raged at you. Don't say anything to irritate me, Ciss; I'm not quite sure of myself yet.”

“But I think the raging would have been preferable; I've had the dreariest day I ever spent.”

“I suppose some one or other called?”

“Yes, but I didn't see them. You have made me very uncertain of how I ought to behave. I thought it better to keep to myself till we had come to a clearer understanding.”

“That is perversity, you know. And it was perversity that led you to write in such a way to Mrs. Travis.”

“You are quite right. But the provocation was great. And after all I don't see that there is much difference between writing to her that she mustn't come, and giving directions to a servant that she isn't to be admitted.”

“You said in the letter that *I* had forbidden it?”

“Yes, I did.”

“And so made me ridiculous!” he exclaimed petulantly.

“My dear, you *were* ridiculous. It’s better that you should see it plainly.”

“The letter will be shown to all sorts of people. Your aunt will see it, of course. You are ingenious in revenging yourself.”

Cecily bent her head, and could not trust herself to speak. All day she had been thinking of this, and had repented of her foolish haste. Yet confession of error was impossible in her present mood.

“As you make such a parade of obedience,” he continued, with increasing anger, “I should think it would be better to obey honestly. I never said that I wished you to break with her in this fashion.”

“Anything else would be contemptible. I can’t subdue myself to that.”

“Very well; then to be logical you must

give up society altogether. It demands no end of contemptible things."

"Will you explain to me why you think that letter will make you ridiculous?"

Reuben hesitated.

"Is it ridiculous," she added, "for a man to forbid his wife to associate with a woman of doubtful character?"

"I told you distinctly that I had no definite charge to bring against her. Caution would have been reasonable enough, but to act as you have represented me is sheer Philistinism."

"Precisely. And it *was* Philistinism in you to take the matter as you did. Be frank with me. Why should you wish to have a name for liberal thinking among your acquaintances, and yet behave in private like the most narrow of men?"

"That is your misrepresentation. Of course, if you refuse to understand me——"

He broke off, and went to another part of the room.

"Shall I tell you what all this means,

Reuben?" said Cecily, turning towards him. "We have lived so long in solitude, that the common circumstances of society are strange and disturbing to us. Solitary people are theoretical people. You would never have thought of forbidding me to read such and such a book, on the ground that it took me into doubtful company; the suggestion of such intolerance would have made you laugh scornfully. You have become an idealist of a curious kind; you like to think of me as an emancipated woman, and yet, when I have the opportunity of making my independence practical, you show yourself alarmed. I am not sure that I understand you entirely; I should be very sorry to explain your words of the other night in the sense they would bear on the lips of an ordinary man. Can't you help me out of this difficulty?"

Reuben was reflecting, and had no reply ready.

"If there is to be all this difference between theory and practice," Cecily con-

tinued, "it must either mean that you think otherwise than you speak, or else that I have shown myself in some way very untrustworthy. You say you have been angry with me; I have felt both angry and deeply hurt. Suppose you had known certainly that Mrs. Travis was not an honourable woman, even then it was wrong to speak to me as you did. Even then it would have been inconsistent to forbid me to see her. You put yourself and me on different levels. You make me your inferior—morally your inferior. What should you say if I began to warn you against one or other of the men you know—if I put on a stern face, and told you that your morals were in danger?"

"Pooh! what harm can a man take?"

"And pray what harm can a woman take, if her name happens to be Cecily Elgar?"

She drew herself up, and stood regarding him with superb self-confidence.

"Without meaning it, you insult me,

Reuben. You treat me as a vulgar husband treats a vulgar wife. What harm to me do you imagine? Don't let us deal in silly evasions and roundabout phrases. Do you distrust my honour? Do you think I can be degraded by association? What woman living has power to make me untrue to myself?"

"You are getting rhetorical, Cecily. Then at this rate I should *never* be justified in interfering?"

"In interfering with mere command, never."

"Not if I saw you going to destruction?"

She smiled haughtily.

"When it comes to that, we'll discuss the question anew. But I see that you think it possible. Evidently I have given proof of some dangerous weakness. Tell me what it is, and I shall understand you better."

"I'm afraid all this talk leads to nothing. You claim an independence which will make it very difficult for us to live on the old terms."

"I claim nothing more than your own theories have always granted."

"Then practice shows that the theories are untenable, as in many another case."

"You refuse me the right to think for myself."

"In some things, yes. Because, as I said before, you haven't experience enough to go upon."

Cecily cast down her eyes. She forced herself to keep silence until that rush of indignant rebellion had gone by. Reuben looked at her askance.

"If you still loved me as you once did," he said, in a lower voice, "this would be no hardship. Indeed, I should never have had to utter such words."

"I still do love you," she answered, very quietly. "If I did not, I should revolt against your claim. But it is too certain that we no longer live on the old terms."

They avoided each other's eyes, and after a long silence left the room without again speaking.



CHAPTER IV.

THE DENYERS IN ENGLAND.

“THERE!” said Mrs. Denyer, laying money on the table. “There are your wages, up to the end of April—notwithstanding your impertinence to me this morning, you see. Once more I forgive you. And now get on with your work, and let us have no more unpleasantness.”

It was in the back parlour of a small house at Hampstead, a room scantily furnished and not remarkably clean. Mrs. Denyer sat at the table, some loose papers before her. She was in mourning, but still fresh of complexion, and a trifle stouter than when we knew her in Naples, two years and a half ago. Her words were addressed to a domestic (most plainly, of all work), who without ceremony gathered

the coins up in both her hands, counted them, and then said with decision :

“Now I’m goin’, mum.”

“Going ? Indeed you are not, my girl ! You don’t leave this house without the due notice.”

“Notice or no notice, I’m a-goin’,” said the other, firmly. “I never thought to a’ got even this much, an’ now I’ve got it, I’m a-goin’. It’s wore me out, has this ’ouse ; what with——”

The conflict lasted for a good quarter of an hour, but the domestic was to be shaken neither with threats nor prayers. Resolutely did she ascend to her bedroom, promptly did she pack her box. Almost before Mrs. Denyer could realize the disaster that had befallen, her house was servantless.

She again sat in the back parlour, gazing blankly at the table, when there came the sound of the house-door opening, followed by a light tread in the passage.

“Barbara !” called Mrs. Denyer.

Barbara presented herself. She also wore mourning, genteel but inexpensive. Her prettiness endured, but she was pale, and had a chronic look of discontent.

“Well, now, what do you think has happened? Shut the door. I paid Charlotte the wages, and the very first thing she did was to pack and go!”

“And you mean to say you let her? Why, you must be crazy!”

“Don’t speak to me in that way!” cried her mother, hotly. “How could I prevent her, when she was determined? I did my utmost, but nothing could induce her to stay. Was ever anything so distracting! The very day after letting our rooms! However are we to manage?”

“I shall have nothing to do with it. The girl wouldn’t have gone if I’d been here. You must manage how you can.”

“It’s no use talking like that, Barbara. You’re bound to wait upon Mrs. Travis until we get another girl.”

“I?” exclaimed her daughter. “Wait

on her yourself! I certainly shall do nothing of the kind."

"You're a bad, cruel, undutiful girl!" cried Mrs. Denyer, her face on fire. "Neither of your sisters ever treated me as you do. You're the only one of the family that has never given the least help, and you're the only one that day by day insults me and behaves with heartless selfishness! I'm to wait on the lodger myself, am I? Very well! I will do so, and see if anything in the world will shame you. She shall know *why* I wait on her, be sure of that!"

Barbara swept out of the room, and ascended the stairs to the second floor. Here again she heard her name called, in a soft voice and interrogatively; in reply, she entered a small bedroom, saying impatiently:

"What is it, Mad?"

It was seen at the first glance that this had long been a sick-chamber. The arrangement of the furniture, the medicine-bottles, the appliances for the use of one

who cannot rise from bed, all told their story. The air had a peculiar scent ; an unnatural stillness seemed to pervade it. Against the raised white pillow showed a face hardly less white.

“ Isn’t it provoking, Barbara ? ” said the invalid, without moving in the least. “ Whatever shall you do ? ”

“ As best we can, I suppose. I’ve to turn cook and housemaid and parlour-maid, now. Scullery-maid too. I suppose I shall clean the steps to-morrow morning.”

“ Oh, but you must go to a registry-office the very first thing. Don’t upset yourself about it. If you can just manage to get that lady’s dinner.”

“ It’s all very well for you to talk ! How would *you* like to *wait* on people, like a girl in a restaurant ? ”

“ Ah, if only I could ! ” replied Madeline, with a little laugh that was heart-breaking. “ If only I could ! ”

In a month it would be two years since

Madeline stood and walked like other people ; live as long as she might, she would never rise from her bed. It came about in this way. Whilst the Denyers were living in the second-class hotel at Southampton, and when Mr. Denyer had been gone to Vera Cruz some five months, a little ramble was taken one day in a part of the New Forest. Madeline was in particularly good spirits ; she had succeeded in getting an engagement to teach some children, and her work was to begin the next day. In a frolic she set herself to jump over a fallen tree ; her feet slipped on the dry grass beyond, and she fell with her back upon the trunk.

This was pleasant news to send to her father ! With him things were going as well as he had anticipated, and before long he was able to make substantial remittances, but his letters were profoundly sad. In a year's time, the family quitted Southampton and took the house at Hampstead ; with much expense and difficulty, Madeline was

removed. Mrs. Denyer and Barbara were weary of provincial life, and considered nothing in their resolve to be within reach of London amusements. Zillah was living as governess with a family in Yorkshire.

They had been settled at Hampstead three weeks, when information reached them that Mr. Denyer was dead of yellow fever.

On the day when this news came, the house received no less important a visitor than Mr. Musselwhite. Long ago, Mrs. Denyer had written to him from Southampton, addressing her letter to the club in London of which he had spoken; she had received a prompt reply, dated from rooms in London, and thenceforth the correspondence was established. But Mr. Musselwhite never spoke of coming to Southampton; his letters ended with "Sincere regards to Miss Denyer and the other young ladies," but they contained nothing that was more to the point. He wrote about the weather chiefly. Arrived in London, Mrs. Denyer at once sent an

invitation, and to her annoyance this remained unanswered. To-day the explanation was forthcoming; Mr. Musselwhite had been on a journey, and by some mistake the letter had only come into his hands when he returned. He was most gentlemanly in his expressions of condolence with the family in their distress; he sat with them, moreover, much longer than was permissible under the circumstances by the code of society. And on going, he begged to be allowed to see them frequently—that was all.

Barbara could not control herself for irritation; Mrs. Denyer was indignant. Yet, after all, was it to be expected that the visitor should say or do more on such an occasion as this? In any case, he knew what their position was; all had been put before him, as though he were a member of the family. If they succeeded in obtaining whatever Mr. Denyer had died possessed of, it would certainly be nothing more than a provision for the present. When they

spoke of taking a lodger for their first floor, Mr. Musselwhite agreed that this was a good thought, whilst shaking his gentlemanly head over the necessity.

He came again and again, always sadly sympathetic. He would sit in the drawing-room for an hour, pulling his whiskers and moustaches nervously, often glancing at Barbara, making the kindest inquiries concerning Madeline, for whom he actually brought flowers. On one of these occasions, he told them that his brother the baronet was very ill, down at the "place in Lincolnshire." And after mentioning this, he fell into abstraction.

As for Madeline, she still received letters from Clifford Marsh. On first hearing of the accident, Clifford at once came to Southampton; his distress was extreme. But it was useless for him to remain, and business demanded his return to Leeds. Neither he nor Madeline was yet aware of the gravity of what had happened; they talked of recovery. Before long Madeline knew

how her situation was generally regarded, but she could not abandon hope ; she was able to write, and not a word in her letters betrayed a doubt of the possibility that she might yet be well again. Clifford wrote very frequently for the first year, with a great deal of genuine tenderness, with compassion and encouragement. Never mind how long her illness lasted, let her be assured of his fidelity ; no one but Madeline should ever be his wife. A considerable part of his letters was always occupied with lamentation over the cursed fate that bound him to the Philistines, though he took care to repeat that this was the result of his own choice, and that he blamed no one—unless it were his gross-minded step-father, who had driven him to such an alternative. These bewailings grew less vehement as his letters became shorter and arrived at longer intervals ; there began to be a sameness in the tone, even in the words. When his yearly holiday came round, he promised to visit Southampton, but after all never did

so. What was the use ? he wrote. It only meant keener misery to both. Instead of coming south, he had gone into Scotland.

And Madeline no longer expressed a wish to see him. Her own letters grew shorter and calmer, containing at length very little about herself, but for the most part news of family affairs. Every now and then Clifford seemed to rouse himself to the effort of repeating his protestations, of affirming his deathless faith ; but as a rule he wrote about trifles, sometimes even of newspaper matters. So did the second year of Madeline's martyrdom come to its close.

Quarrelling incessantly, Mrs. Denyer and Barbara prepared the lodger's dinner between them. This Mrs. Travis was not exacting ; she had stipulated only for a cutlet, or something of the kind, with two vegetables, and a milk pudding. Whatever was proposed seemed to suit her. The Denyers knew nothing about her, except

that she was able to refer them to a lady who had a house in Mayfair; her husband, she said, was abroad. She had brought a great deal of luggage, including books to the number of fifty or so.

When the moment for decision came, Barbara snatched up the folded white tablecloth, threw it with knives, forks, and plates upon a tray, and ascended to the lodger's sitting-room. Her cheeks were hot; her eyes flashed. She had donned the most elegant attire in her possession, had made her hair magnificent. Her knock at the door was meant to be a declaration of independence; it sounded peremptory.

Mrs. Travis was in an easy-chair, reading. She looked up absently; then smiled.

“Good evening, Miss Denyer. How close it has been again!”

“Very. I must ask you to excuse me, Mrs. Travis, if I do these things rather awkwardly. At a moment's notice, we have lost the servant whose duty it was.”

“Oh, I am only sorry that you should

have the trouble. Let us lay the table together. I've done it often enough for myself. No, that's the wrong side of the cloth. I'll put these things in order, whilst you go for the rest."

Barbara looked at Mrs. Travis with secret disdain. The girl's nature was plebeian; a little arrogance would have constrained her to respect, however she might have seemed to resent it. This good-natured indifference made her feel that her preparations were thrown away. She would have preferred to see herself as a martyr.

When dinner was over and the table being cleared, Mrs. Travis spoke of Madeline.

"Does she sleep well at night?"

"Never till very late," replied Barbara.

"Does she like to be read to?"

"Oh yes—reading of certain kinds. I often read Italian poetry to her."

Mrs. Travis had not now to learn for the first time of the family's superior attain-

ments; it had been Mrs. Denyer's care to impress upon her that they were no ordinary letters of lodgings. Indeed, said Mrs. Denyer, they were rather *dépaysées* here in England; they had so long been accustomed to the larger intellectual atmosphere of Continental centres. "The poor girls pine for Italy; they have always adored Italy. My eldest daughter is far more Italian than English."

"Well, I don't read Italian," said Mrs. Travis to Barbara, "but if English would do, I should really like to sit with her for an hour sometimes. I never sleep myself if I go to bed before midnight. Do you think she would care for my company?"

"I am sure she would be grateful to you," answered Barbara, who felt that she might now exhibit a little politeness.

"Then please ask her if I may come to-night."

This request was readily granted, and at about half-past nine Mrs. Travis went into the sick-chamber, taking in her hand a

volume of Browning. Madeline had not yet seen the lodger ; she returned her greeting in a murmur, and examined her with the steady eyes of one whom great suffering has delivered from all petty embarrassments. Her face was not so calm as when Barbara came to speak to her in the afternoon ; lines of pain showed themselves on her forehead, and her thin lips were compressed.

“It’s very good of you to come,” she said, when Mrs. Travis had taken a seat by the bed. “But please don’t read anything to-night. I don’t feel that I could take any interest. It is so sometimes.”

“Naturally enough. But do you feel able to talk ?”

“Yes ; I had rather talk. Can you tell me something quite new and different from what I’m accustomed to hear ? Do you know any country where I haven’t been ?”

“I haven’t travelled much. Last autumn I was in Iceland for a few weeks ; would you care to hear of that ?”

“Very much. Just talk as if you were

going over it in your memory. Don't mind if I close my eyes ; I shan't be asleep ; it helps me to imagine, that's all."

Mrs. Travis did as she was asked. Now and then Madeline put a question. When at length there came a pause, she said abruptly :

"I suppose it seems dreadful to you, to see me lying here like this ?"

"It makes me wish I had it in my power to relieve you."

"But does it seem dreadful ? Could you bear to imagine yourself in the same case ? I want you to tell me truthfully. I'm not an uneducated girl, you know ; I can think about life and death as people do nowadays."

Mrs. Travis looked at her curiously.

"I can imagine positions far worse," she answered.

"That means, of course, that you could not bear to picture yourself in this. But it's strange how one can get used to it. The first year I suffered horribly—in mind, I mean. But then I still had hope. I

have none now, and that keeps my mind calmer. A paradox, isn't it? It's always possible, you know, that I may feel such a life unendurable at last, and then I should hope to find a means of bringing it to an end. For instance, if we become so poor that I am too great a burden. Of course I wouldn't live in a hospital. I don't mean I should be too proud, but the atmosphere would be intolerable. And one really needn't live, after one has decided that it's no use."

"I don't know what to say about that," murmured Mrs. Travis.

"No; you haven't had the opportunity of thinking it over, as I have. I can imagine myself reaching the point when I should not care to have health again, even if it were offered me. I haven't come to that yet; oh no! To-night I am feeling dreadfully what I have lost—not like I used to, but still dreadfully. Will you tell me something about yourself? What kind of books do you like?"

“Pretty much the same as you do, I should fancy. I like to know what new things people are discovering, and how the world looks to clever men. But I can’t study; I have no perseverance. I read the reviews a good deal.”

“You’d never guess the last book I have read. It lies on the chest of drawers there—a treatise on all the various kinds of paralysis. The word ‘paralysis’ used to have the most awful sound to me; now I’m so familiar with it that it has ceased to be shocking and become interesting. What I am suffering from is called *paraplegia*; that’s when the lower half of the body is affected; it comes from injury or disease of the spinal cord. The paralysis begins at the point in the vertebral column where the injury was received. But it tends to spread upward. If it gets as far as certain nerves upon which the movements of the diaphragm depend, then you die. I wonder whether that will be my case?”

Mrs. Travis kept her eyes on the girl

during this singular little lecture ; she felt the fascination which is exercised by strange mental phenomena.

“Do you know Italy ?” Madeline asked, with sudden transition.

“I have travelled through it, like other tourists.”

“You went to Naples ?”

“Yes.”

“If I close my eyes, how well I can see Naples ! Now I am walking through the Villa Nazionale. I come out into the Largo Vittoria, where the palm-trees are—do you remember ? Now I might go into the Chiatamone, between the high houses ; but instead of that I’ll turn down into Via Caracciolo and go along by the sea, till I’m opposite the Castel dell’ Ovo. Now I’m turning the corner and coming on to Santa Lucia, where there are stalls with shells and ices and fish. I can smell the Santa Lucia. And to think that I shall never see it again, never again.—Don’t stay any longer now, Mrs. Travis. I can’t

talk any more. Thank you for being so kind."

In a week's time it had become a regular thing for Mrs. Travis to spend an hour or two daily with Madeline. Their conversation was suitable enough to a sick-chamber, yet strangely unlike what is wont to pass in such places. On Madeline's side it was thoroughly morbid; on that of her visitor, a curious mixture of unhealthy speculation and pure feeling. Mrs. Travis was at first surprised that the suffering girl never seemed to think of ordinary religion as a solace. She herself had no fixity of faith; her mind played constantly with creeds of negation; but she felt it as an unnatural thing for one of Madeline's age to profess herself wholly without guidance on so dark a journey. And presently she began to doubt whether the profession were genuine. The characteristic of the family was pretence and posing; Mrs. Denyer and Barbara illustrated that every time they spoke. Not impossibly Madeline did

but declare the same tendency in her rambling and quasi-philosophic talk. She was fond of warning Mrs. Travis against attributing to her the common prejudices of women. And yet, were it affectation, then the habit must be so inextricably blended with her nature as to have become in practice a genuine motive in the mind's working. Madeline would speculate on the difference between one of her "culture" in the circumstances and the woman who is a slave of tradition; and a moment after she would say something so profoundly pathetic that it brought tears to her companion's eyes.

Mrs. Travis never spoke of her personal affairs; Madeline could supply no food for the curiosity of her mother and sister when they questioned her about the long private conversations. The lodger received no visitors, and seldom a letter. In the morning she went out for an hour, generally towards the heath; occasionally she was from home until late at night. About the

quality of the attendance given her she was wholly indifferent; in spite of frequent inconveniences, she made her weekly payments without a word of dissatisfaction. She had a few eccentricities of behaviour which the Denyers found it difficult to reconcile with the refinement of her ordinary conduct. Once or twice, when the servant went into her sitting-room the first thing in the morning, she was surprised to find Mrs. Travis lying asleep on the couch, evidently just as she had come home the previous night, except that her bonnet was removed. It had happened, too, that when some one came and knocked at her door during the day, she vouchsafed no answer, and yet made the sound of moving about, as if to show that she did not choose to be disturbed, for whatever reason.

The household went its regular way. Mrs. Denyer sat in her wonted idle dignity, or scolded the hard-driven maid-of-all-work, or quarrelled fiercely with Barbara. Barbara

was sullen, insolent, rebellious against fate, by turns. Up in the still room lay poor Madeline, seldom visited by either of the two save when it was necessary. All knew that the position of things had no security ; before long there must come a crisis worse than any the family had yet experienced. Unless, indeed, that one hope which remained to them could be realized.

One afternoon at the end of July, mother and daughter were sitting over their tea, lamenting the necessity which kept them in London when the eternal fitness of things demanded that they should be preparing for travel. They heard a vehicle draw up before the house, and Barbara, making cautious espial from the windows, exclaimed that it was Mr. Musselwhite.

“He has a lot of flowers, as usual,” she added scornfully, watching him as he paid the cabman. “Go into the back room, mamma. Let’s say you’re not at home to-day. Send for the teapot, and get some more tea made.”

There came a polite knock at the front door, and Mrs. Denyer disappeared.

Mr. Musselwhite entered with a look and bearing much graver than usual. He made the proper remarks, and gave Barbara the flowers for her sister ; then seated himself, and stroked his moustache.

“Miss Denyer,” he began, when Barbara waited wearily for the familiar topic, “my brother, Sir Grant, died a week ago.”

“I am very grieved to hear it,” she replied mechanically, at once absorbed in speculation as to whether this would make any change that concerned her.

“It was a long and painful illness, and recovery was known to be impossible. Yet I too cannot help grieving. As you know, we had not seen much of each other for some years, but I had the very highest opinion of Sir Grant, and it always gave me pleasure to think of him as the head of our family. He was a man of great abilities, and a kind man.”

“I am sure he was—from what you have told me of him.”

“My nephew succeeds to the title and the estate ; he is now Sir Roland Musselwhite. I have mentioned him in our conversations. He is about thirty-four, a very able man, and very kind, very generous.”

There was a distinct tremor in his voice ; he pulled his moustache vigorously. Barbara listened with painful eagerness.

“If you will forgive me for speaking of my private circumstances, Miss Denyer, I should like to tell you that for some years I have enjoyed only a very restricted income ; a bachelor’s allowance—really it amounted to nothing more than that. In consequence of that, my life has been rather unsettled ; I scarcely knew what to do with myself, in fact ; now and then time has been rather heavy on my hands. You may have noticed that, for I know you are observant.”

He waited for her to say whether she had or had not observed this peculiarity in him.

“I have sometimes been afraid that was the case,” said Barbara.

“I quite thought so.” He smiled with gratification. “But now—if I may speak a little longer of these personal matters—all that is altered, and by the very great kindness, the generosity, of my nephew Sir Roland. Sir Roland has seen fit to put me in possession of an income just three times what I have hitherto commanded. This does not, Miss Denyer, make me a wealthy man; far from it. But it puts certain things within my reach that I could not think of formerly. For instance, I shall be able to take a modest house, either in the country, or here in one of the suburbs. It’s my wish to do so. My one great wish is to settle down and have something to—to occupy my time.”

Barbara breathed a faint approval.

“You may wonder, Miss Denyer, why I trouble you with these details. Perhaps I might be pardoned for doing so, if I spoke with—with a desire for your friendly sympathy. But there is more than that in my mind. The day is come, Miss Denyer,

when I am able to say what I would gladly have said before our parting at Naples, if it had been justifiable in me. That is rather a long time ago, but the feeling I then had has only increased in the meanwhile. Miss Denyer, I desire humbly to ask if you will share with me my new prosperity, such as it is ? ”

The interview lasted an hour and a quarter. Mrs. Denyer panted with impatience in the back parlour. Such an extended visit could not but have unusual significance. On hearing the door of the other room open, she stood up and listened. But there was no word in the passage, no audible murmur.

The front door closed, and in two ticks of the clock Barbara came headlong into the parlour. With broken breath, with hysterical laughing and sobbing, she made known what had happened. It was too much for her ; the relief of suspense, the absolute triumph, were more than she could

support with decency. Mrs. Denyer shed tears, and embraced her daughter as if they had always been on the fondest terms.

“Go up and tell Maddy!”

But, as not seldom befalls, happiness inspired Barbara with a delicacy of feeling to which as a rule she was a stranger.

“I don’t like to, mamma. It seems cruel.”

“But you can’t help it, my dear; and she must know to-morrow if not to-day.”

So before long Barbara went upstairs. She entered the room softly. Madeline had her eyes fixed on the ceiling, and did not move them as her sister approached the bed.

“Maddy!”

Then indeed she looked at the speaker, and with surprise, so unwonted was this tone on Barbara’s lips. Surprise was quickly succeeded by a smile.

“I know, Barbara; I understand.”

“What? How can you?”

“I heard a cab drive up, and I heard a knock at the door. ‘That’s Mr. Musselwhite,’ I thought. He has been here a

long time, and now I understand. You needn't tell me."

"But there's a good deal to tell that you can't have found out, quick as you are."

And she related the circumstances. Madeline listened with her eyes again on the ceiling.

"We shall be married very soon," Barbara added; "as soon as a house can be chosen, Of course it must be in London, or very near. We shall go somewhere or other, and then, very likely, pay a formal visit to the 'place in Lincolnshire.' Think of that! Sir Roland seems a good sort of man; he will welcome us. Think of visiting at the 'place in Lincolnshire'! Isn't it all like a dream?"

"What will mamma do without you?"

"Oh, Zillah is to come home. We'll see about that."

"I suppose he forgot to bring me some flowers to-day?"

"No! But I declare I forgot to bring them up. I'll fetch them at once."

She did so, running downstairs and up again like a child, with a jump at the landings. The flowers were put in the usual place. Madeline looked at them, and listened to her sister's chatter for five minutes. Then she said absently :

"Go away now, please. I've heard enough for the present."

"You shall have all sorts of comforts, Maddy."

"Go away, Barbara."

The sister obeyed, looking back with compassion from the door. She closed it softly, and in the room there was the old perfect stillness. Madeline had let her eyelids fall, and the white face against the white pillows was like that of one dead. But upon the eyelashes there presently shone a tear ; it swelled, broke away, and left a track of moisture. Poor white face, with the dark hair softly shadowing its temples ! Poor troubled brain, wearying itself in idle questioning of powers that heeded not !



CHAPTER V.

MULTUM IN PARVO.

ELGAR'S marriage had been a great success. For a year and a half, for even more than that, he had lived the fullest and most consistent life of which he was capable ; what proportion of the sons of men can look back on an equal span of time in their own existence and say the same of it ?

Life with Cecily gave predominance to all the noblest energies in his nature. He loved with absolute sincerity ; his ideal of womanhood was for the time realized and possessed ; the vagrant habit of his senses seemed permanently subdued ; his mind was occupied with high admirations and creative fancies ; in thought and speech he was ardent, generous, constant, hopeful. A happy marriage can do no more for man

than make unshadowed revelation of such aspiring faculty as he is endowed withal. It cannot supply him with a force greater than he is born to ; even as the happiest concurrence of healthful circumstances cannot give more strength to a physical constitution than its origin warrants. At this period of his life, Reuben Elgar could not have been more than, with Cecily's help, he showed himself. Be the future advance or retrogression, he had lived the possible life.

Whose the fault that it did not continue ? Cecily's, if it were blameworthy to demand too much ; Elgar's, if it be wrong to learn one's own limitations.

His making definite choice of a subject whereon to employ his intellect was at one and the same time a proof of how far his development had progressed and a warning of what lay before him. However chaotic the material in which he proposed to work, however inadequate his powers, it was yet a truth that, could he execute anything at all, it would be something of the kind thus

vaguely contemplated. His intellect was combative, and no subject excited it to such activity as this of Hebraic constraint in the modern world. You conceive readily enough what kind of work he wished to produce ; this and that example from existing literature occur to you ; but Elgar's book, supposing him to have been capable of writing it, would have resembled no other ; it would have been, as he justly said, unique in its anti-dogmatic passion. It was quite in the order of things that he should propose to write it ; equally so, that the attempt should mark the end of his happiness.

For all that she seemed to welcome the proposal with enthusiasm, Cecily's mind secretly misgave her. She had begun to understand Reuben, and she foresaw, with a certainty which she in vain tried to combat, how soon his energy would fail upon so great a task. Impossible to admonish him ; impossible to direct him on a humbler path, where he might attain some result.

With Reuben's temperament to deal with, that would mean a fatal disturbance of their relations to each other. That the disturbance must come in any case, now that he was about to prove himself, she anticipated in many a troubled moment, but would not let the forecast discourage her.

And there began Cecily's misfortune, for, of course, it is idle to use the word "fault" in such connection. When by the blessing of her love a strong woman has put joyous activity in the heart of a man whose life has suffered misdirection and vain tumult, there is one supreme gift she must yet bestow if her influence is to remain beneficent: she must teach him self-knowledge and resignation therein. No harder task than this, for love only can perform it, and yet the undertaking is love's greatest peril. Cecily was foredoomed to failure by the fact that she was only now beginning to know herself, and, as a consequence, to perceive how greatly her love had been the outcome of youthful illusion. When each

new discovery of Reuben's limitations was a pang and a fear to her, how could she encourage him against his own discouragements? When she herself avoided looking forward, and that in conscious cowardice, how was she to bid him keep a steadfast face?

Pretence in this case is worse than useless, and Cecily was incapable of sustained disguise. Elgar knew how his failure in perseverance affected her; he looked for the signs of her disappointment, and was at no loss to find them. It was natural to him to exaggerate the diminution of her esteem; he attributed to her what, in her place, he would himself have felt; he soon imagined that she had as good as ceased to love him. He could not bear to be less in her eyes than formerly; a jealous shame stung him, and at length made him almost bitter against her.

In that way came about his extraordinary outbreak that night when Cecily had been alone to her aunt's. Pent-up irritation drove him into the extravagances which to

Cecily were at first incredible. He could not utter what was really in his mind, and the charges he made against her were modes of relieving himself. Yet, as soon as they had once taken shape, these rebukes obtained a real significance of their own. Coincident with Cecily's disappointment in him had been the sudden exhibition of her pleasure in society. Under other circumstances, his wife's brilliancy among strangers might have been pleasurable to Elgar. His faith in her was perfect, and jealousy of the ignobler kind came not near him. But he felt that she was taking refuge from the dulness of her home ; he imagined people speaking of him as "the husband of Mrs. Elgar ;" it exasperated him to think of her talking with clever men who must necessarily suggest comparisons to her.

(He himself was not the kind of man who shines in company. He had never been trained to social usages, and he could not feel at ease in any drawing-room but his own. The Bohemianism of his early life

had even given him a positive distaste for social obligations and formalities. Among men of his own way of thinking, he could talk vigorously, and as a rule keep the lead in conversation; but where restraint in phrase was needful, he easily became flaccid, and the feeling that he did not show to advantage filled him with disgust.) So there was little chance of his ever winning that sort of reputation which would have enabled him to accompany his wife into society without the galling sense of playing an inferior *rôle*.

In the matter of Mrs. Travis, he was conscious of his own arbitrariness, but, having once committed himself to a point of view, he could not withdraw from it. He had to find fault with his wife and her society, and here was an obvious resource. Its very obviousness should, of course, have warned him away, but his reason for attacking Mrs. Travis had an intimate connection with the general causes of his discontent. Disguise it how he might, he was simply in

the position of a husband who fears that his authority over his wife is weakening. Mrs. Travis, as he knew, was a rebel against her own husband—no matter the cause. She would fill Cecily's mind with sympathetic indignation; the effect would be to make Cecily more resolute in independence. Added to this, there was, in truth, something of that conflict between theoretical and practical morality of which his wife spoke. It developed in the course of argument; he recognized that, whilst having all confidence in Cecily, he could not reconcile himself to her associating with a woman whose conduct was under discussion. The more he felt his inconsistency, the more arbitrary he was compelled to be. Motives confused themselves and harassed him. In his present mood, the danger of such a state of things was greater than he knew, and of quite another kind than Cecily was prepared for.

“What is all this about Mrs. Travis?”

inquired Mrs. Lessingham, with a smile, when she came to visit Cecily. Reuben was out, and the ladies sat alone in the drawing-room.

Cecily explained what had happened, but in simple terms, and without meaning to show that any difference of opinion had arisen between her and Reuben.

“ You have heard of it from Mrs. Travis herself ? ” she asked, in conclusion.

“ Yes. She expressed no resentment, however ; spoke as if she thought it a little odd, that was all. But what has Reuben got into his head ? ”

“ It seems he has heard unpleasantrumours about her.”

“ Then why didn’t he come and speak to me ? She is absolutely blameless ; I can answer for it. Her husband is the kind of man—— Did you ever read Fielding’s ‘ Amelia ’ ? To be sure ; well, you understand. I much doubt whether she is wise in leaving him ; ten to one, she’ll go back again, and that is more demoralizing than putting up with

the other indignity. She has a very small income of her own, and what is her life to be? Surely you are the last people who should abandon her. That is the kind of thing that makes such a woman desperate. She seems to have made a sort of appeal to you. I am but moderately in her confidence, and I believe she hasn't one bosom-friend. It's most unfortunate that Reuben took such a whim. Send him to me, will you?"

Cecily made known this request to her husband, and there followed another long dialogue between them, the only result of which was to increase their mutual coldness. Cecily proposed that they should at once leave town, instead of waiting for the end of the season; in this way all their difficulties would be obviated. Elgar declined the proposal; he had no desire to spoil her social pleasures.

"That is already done, past help," Cecily rejoined, with the first note of bitterness. "I no longer care to visit, nor to receive guests."

“I noticed the other day your ingenuity in revenging yourself.”

“I say nothing but the simple truth. Had you rather I went out and enjoyed myself without any reference to your wishes?”

“From the first you made up your mind to misunderstand me,” said Reuben, with the common evasion of one who cannot defend his course.

Cecily brought the dispute to an end by her silence. The next morning Reuben went to see Mrs. Lessingham, and heard what she had to say about Mrs. Travis.

“What is your evidence against her?” she inquired, after a little banter.

“Some one who knows Travis very well assured me that the fault was not all on his side.”

“Of course. It is more to the point to hear what those have to say who know his wife. Surely you acted with extraordinary haste.”

With characteristic weakness, Elgar de-

fended himself by detailing the course of events. It was not he who had been precipitate, but Cecily; he was never more annoyed than when he heard of that foolish letter.

“Go home and persuade her to write another,” said Mrs. Lessingham. “Let her confess that there was a misunderstanding. I am sure Mrs. Travis will accept it. She has a curious character; very sensitive, and very impulsive, but essentially trustful and warm-hearted. You should have heard the pathetic surprise with which she told me of Cecily’s letter.”

“I should rather have imagined her speaking contemptuously.”

“It would have been excusable,” replied the other, with a laugh. “And very likely that would have been her tone had it concerned any one else. But she has a liking for Cecily. Go home, and get this foolish mistake remedied, there’s a good boy.”

Elgar left the house and walked east-

ward, into Praed Street. As he walked, he grew less and less inclined to go home at once. He could not resolve how to act. It would be a satisfaction to have done with discord, but he had no mind to submit to Cecily and entreat her to a peace.

He walked on, across Edgware Road, into Marylebone Road, absorbed in his thoughts. Their complexion became darker. He found a perverse satisfaction in picturing Cecily's unhappiness. Let her suffer a little; she was causing *him* uneasiness enough. The probability was that she derided his recent behaviour; it had doubtless sunk him still more in her estimation. The only way to recover his lost ground was to be as open with her as formerly, to confess all his weaknesses and foolish motives; but his will resisted. He felt coldly towards her; she was no longer the woman he loved and worshipped, but one who had asserted a superiority of mind and character, and belittled him to himself. He was tired of her society—the simple formula which

sufficiently explains so many domestic troubles.

He would go and have lunch somewhere in town ; then see whether he felt disposed to go home or not.

In the afternoon he loitered about the Strand, looking at portraits in shop-windows and at the theatre-doors. Home was more, instead of less, repugnant to him. He wanted to postpone decision ; but if he returned to Cecily, it would be necessary to say something, and in his present mood he would be sure to make matters worse, for he felt quarrelsome. How absurd it was for two people, just because they were married, to live perpetually within sight of each other ! Wasn't it Godwin who, on marrying, made an arrangement that he and his wife should inhabit separate abodes, and be together only when they wished ? The only rational plan, that. Should he take train and go out of town for a few days ? If only he had some one for company ; but it was wearisome to spend the time in solitude.

To aggravate his dulness, the sky had clouded over, and presently it began to rain. He had no umbrella. Quite unable to determine whither he should go if he took a cab, he turned aside to the shelter of an archway. Some one was already standing there, but in his abstraction he did not know whether it was man or woman, until a little cough, twice or thrice repeated, made him turn his eyes. Then he saw that his companion was a girl of about five and twenty, with a pretty, good-natured face, which wore an embarrassed smile. He gazed at her with a look of surprised recognition.

“Well, it really *is* you!” she exclaimed, laughing and looking down.

“And it is really *you*!”

They shook hands, again examining each other.

“I thought you didn’t mean to know me.”

“I hadn’t once looked at you. But you have changed a good deal.”

“Not more than you have, I’m sure.”

"And what are you doing? You look much more cheerful than you used to."

"I can't say the same of you."

"Have you been in London all the time?"

"Oh no. Two years ago I went back to Liverpool, and had a place there for nearly six months. But I got tired of it. In a few days I'm going to Brighton; I've got a place in a restaurant. Quite time, too; I've had nothing for seven weeks."

"I've often thought about you," said Elgar, after a pause.

"But you never came to see how I was getting on."

"Oh, I supposed you were married long since."

She laughed, and shook her head.

"You are, though, I suppose?" she asked.

"Not I!"

They talked with increasing friendliness until the rain stopped, then walked away together in the direction of the City.

About dinner-time, Cecily received a telegram. It was from her husband, and informed her that he had left town with a friend for a day or two.

This was the first instance of such a proceeding on Reuben's part. For a moment, it astonished her. Which of his friends could it be? But when the surprise had passed, she reflected more on his reasons for absenting himself, and believed that she understood them. He wished to punish her; he thought she would be anxious about him, and so come to adopt a different demeanour when he returned. Ever so slight a suspicion of another kind occurred to her once or twice, but she had no difficulty in dismissing it. No; this was merely one of his tactics in the conflict that had begun between them.

And his absence was a relief. She too wanted to think for a while, undisturbed. When she had seen the child in bed and asleep, she moved about the house with a strange sense of freedom, seeming to breathe

more naturally than for several days. She went to the piano, and played some favourite pieces, among them one which she had learnt long ago in Paris. It gave her a curiously keen pleasure, like a revival of her girlhood ; she lingered over it, and nursed the impression. Then she read a little—not continuously, but dipping into familiar books. It was holiday with her. And when she lay down to rest, the sense of being alone was still grateful. Sleep came very soon, and she did not stir till morning.

On the third day Elgar returned, at noon. She heard the cab that brought him. He lingered in the hall, opened the library door ; then came to the drawing-room, humming an air. His look was as different as could be from that she had last seen on his face ; he came towards her with his pleasantest smile, and first kissed her hand, then embraced her in the old way.

“ You haven’t been anxious about me, Ciss ? ”

“Not at all,” she replied quietly, rather permitting his caresses than encouraging them.

“Some one I hadn’t met for several years. He was going down to Brighton, and persuaded me to accompany him. I didn’t write because—well, I thought it would be better if we kept quite apart for a day or two. Things were getting wrong, weren’t they?”

“I’m afraid so. But how are they improved?”

“Why, I had a talk with your aunt, about Mrs. Travis. I quite believe I was misled by that fellow that talked scandal. She seems very much to be pitied, and I’m really sorry that I caused you to break with her.”

Cecily watched him as he spoke, and he avoided her eyes. He was holding her hands and fondling them; now he bent and put them to his lips. She said nothing.

“Suppose you write to her, Ciss, and say that I made a fool of myself. You’re quite

at liberty to do so. Tell her exactly how it was, and ask her to forgive us."

She did not answer immediately.

"Will you do that?"

"I feel ashamed to. I know very well how *I* should receive such a letter."

"Oh, you! But every one hasn't your superb arrogance!" He laughed. "And it's hard to imagine you in such a situation."

"I hope so."

"Aunt tells me that the poor woman has very few friends."

"It's very unlikely that she will ever make one of me. I don't see how it is possible, after this."

"But write the letter, just to make things simpler if you meet anywhere. As a piece of justice, too."

Not that day, but the following, Cecily decided herself to write. She could only frame her excuse in the way Reuben had suggested; necessarily the blame lay on him. The composition cost her a long time, though it was only two pages of note-paper;

and when it was despatched, she could not think without hot cheeks of its recipient reading it. She did not greatly care for Mrs. Travis's intimacy, but she did desire to remove from herself the imputation of censoriousness.

There came an answer in a day or two.

"I was surprised that you (or Mr. Elgar) should so readily believe ill of me, but I am accustomed to such judgments, and no longer resent them. A wife is always in the wrong; when a woman marries, she should prepare herself for this. Or rather, her friends should prepare her, as she has always been kept in celestial ignorance by their care. Pray let us forget what has happened. I won't renew my request to be allowed to visit you; if that is to be, it will somehow come to pass naturally, in the course of time. If we meet at Mrs. Lessingham's, please let us speak not a word of this affair. I hate scenes."

In a week's time, the Elgars' life had

resumed the course it held before that interruption—with the exception that Reuben, as often as it was possible, avoided accompanying his wife when she went from home. His own engagements multiplied, and twice before the end of July he spent Saturday and Sunday out of town. Cecily made no close inquiries concerning his employment of his time ; on their meeting again, he always gave her an account of what he had been doing, and she readily accepted it. For she had now abandoned all hope of his doing serious work ; she never spoke a word which hinted regret at his mode of life. They were on placid terms, and she had no such faith in anything better as would justify her in endangering the recovered calm.

It became necessary at length to discuss what they should do with themselves during the autumn. Mrs. Lessingham was going with friends to the Pyrenees. The Delphs would take a short holiday in Sussex ; Irene could not spare much time from her work.

“I don’t care to be away long myself,” Reuben said, when Cecily mentioned this. “I feel as if I should be able to get on with my Puritanic pursuits again when we return.”

Cecily looked at him, to see if he spoke in earnest. In spite of his jesting tone, he seemed to be serious, for he was pacing the floor, his head bent as if in meditation.

“Make your own plans,” was her reply. “But we won’t go into Cornwall, I think.”

“No, not this year.”

They spent a month at Eastbourne. Some agreeable people whom they were accustomed to meet at Mrs. Lessingham’s had a house there, and supplied them with society. Towards the end of the month, Reuben grew restless and uncertain of temper; he wandered on the downs by himself, and when at home kept silence. The child, too, was constantly ailing, and its cry irritated him.

“The fact of the matter is,” he exclaimed one evening, “I don’t feel altogether well! I

ought to have had more change than this. If I go back and settle to work, I shall break down."

"What kind of change do you wish for?" Cecily asked.

"I should have liked to take a ramble in Germany, or Norway—some new part. But nothing of that is possible. Clarence makes slaves of us."

Cecily reflected.

"There's no reason why he should hinder you from going."

"Oh, I can't leave you alone," he returned impatiently.

"I think you might, for a few weeks—if you feel it necessary. I don't think Clarence ought to leave the seaside till the middle of September. The Robinsons will be here still, you know."

He muttered and grumbled, but in the end proposed that he should go over by one of the Harwich boats, and take what course happened to attract him. Cecily assented, and in a few hours he was ready to bid her

good-bye. She had said that it wasn't worth while going with him to the station, and when he gave her the kiss at parting she kept perfectly tranquil.

"You're not sorry to get rid of me," he said, with a forced laugh.

"I don't wish you to stay at the expense of your health."

"I hope Clarence mayn't damage yours. These sleepless nights are telling on you."

"Go. You'll miss the train."

He looked back from the door, but Cecily had turned away.

He was absent for more than six weeks, during which he wrote frequently from various out-of-the-way places on the Rhine. On returning, he found Cecily in London, very anxious about the child, and herself looking very ill. He, on the other hand, was robust and in excellent spirits; in a day or two he began to go regularly to the British Museum—to say, at all events, that he went there. And so time passed to the year's end.

One night in January, Reuben went to the theatre. He left Cecily sitting in the bedroom, by the fireside, with Clarence on her lap. For several weeks the child had been so ill that Cecily seldom quitted it.

Three hours later she was sitting in the same position, still bent forward, the child still on her lap. But no movement, no cry ever claimed her attention. Tears had stained her face, but they no longer fell. Holding a waxen little hand that would never again caress her, she gazed at the dying fire as though striving to read her destiny.

END OF VOL. II.

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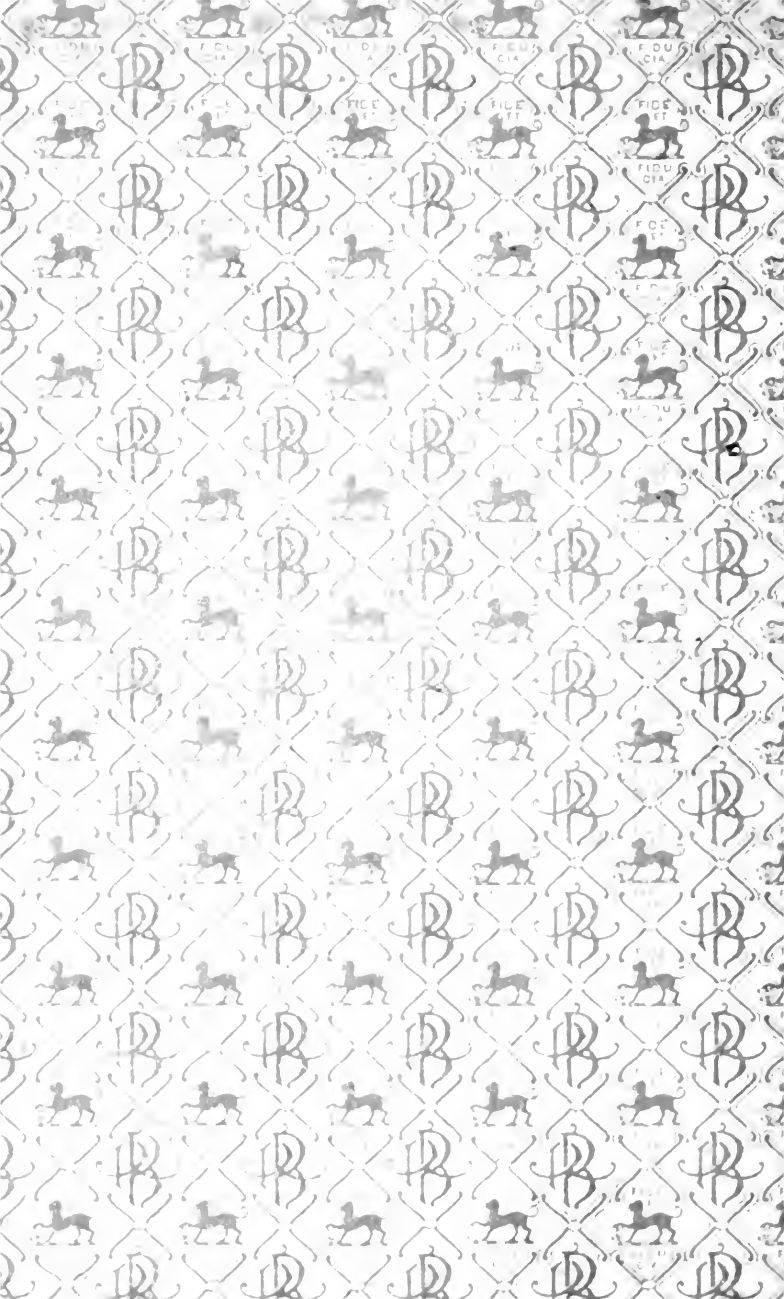
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